

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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Price 5 Cents.

JACK WRIGHT AND HIS IRON CLAD AIR MOTOR; OR, SEARCHING FOR A LOST EXPLORER. By "NONAME."



Jack procured a file. With this he rapidly cut Fritz's fetters and the Dutchman soon liberated the other three. The Japanese keepers recovered from their fright by this time and began to suspect that the flying-machine was not supernatural.

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JACK WRIGHT AND HIS IRONCLAD AIR MOTOR,

OR,

Searching for a Lost Explorer.

By "NONAME,"

J. J. MILLER,
DEALER IN CIGARS & TOBACCO.
We Sell and Eat
320 East 181 St. L. 1000 City N.Y.

CHAPTER I.

A TRAGEDY ON THE SHORE.

It was a dark, gloomy night.

The wind was moaning drearily over Wrightstown bay.

A fleet of fishing-smacks anchored off shore rolled and tugged at their cables, a thick haze swept in from the Atlantic, and there arose a roaring of the surf on the coast below a lighthouse on the rocks at the headland.

In the bay a large ship rode at anchor, and the dull clang of her bell ringing out the half hours tolled lonesomely in the gloom.

Few people ventured from the fishermen's cottages lining the shore at the head of the bay with their ruddy, comfortable lights, for the screech of the sea gulls and the blackening of the sky foretold an impending storm.

A neatly clad boy of sixteen named Royal Maxwell had come down to the shore from a handsome house in the fisher village, and reaching the water he stood earnestly staring out at the ship.

There was a man dogging his footsteps.

He wore the uniform of a ship's captain, and was a heavily built individual, with a bushy, black beard, shaggy eyebrows and a hooked nose, over which a pair of small, treacherous eyes almost met.

This person's name was Captain Adam Sloat.

He was the commander of the ship *Fog Bell*, at which the boy was looking.

Creeping up behind the boy as stealthily as a sat, the burly ruffian raised a huge revolver, which he held clutched in his hand, and dealt Royal Maxwell a crushing blow.

A stifled groan pealed from the poor boy's lips, and he fell stunned.

"I've got him!" muttered the captain, in satisfied tones, as he bent over his victim and peered down at his face. "My only regret is that I did not kill the whelp."

He glanced sharply around.

No one had witnessed the cowardly deed.

Apparently satisfied of this, and evidently anticipating an

end of the affair such as had occurred, he hastened over to a nearby boathouse and picked up a piece of rope from an oak box.

On top of the box lay a wet flour sack.

He eagerly seized it and returned to his victim.

"Just the thing," he muttered. "He could never get out of this."

With considerable difficulty he crowded the senseless boy into the bag, and put several heavy stones in with him.

Tying the mouth of the sack with a rope, he lifted it upon his shoulder and strode away.

The captain directed his steps toward a long pier that ran out into deep water from the shore.

"I'll throw the bag from the end of the dock," he muttered. "The stones will sink it. Royal Maxwell will then be safely out of my way."

Along the margin of the bay he crept, the waves washing in at his feet with a low, splashing noise until he reached the pier.

It had a dark, deserted appearance.

Some rain drops pattered down upon him.

He felt by the movement in the bag that the boy was reviving.

Anxious to plunge his victim in the bay ere he recovered, in order to insure his death, the man hastened his movements.

Reaching the stringpiece at the end of the dock he raised the sack up in both hands and gave it a fling.

A deep groan came from within the bag as he did so.

"Gone!" he exclaimed.

Splash! Went the sack into the water.

Adam Sloat turned to run away, for the commission of the deed had suddenly filled his mind with horror.

"Halt!" said a voice.

Before him stood a young man.

He had been passing, and saw the captain's suspicious actions.

Following him out on the pier, the young man had heard the groan emanate from the bag, but failed to reach the captain in time to stop him from flinging it into the bay.

A cry of fear burst from Sloat's lips.

He turned as pale as death, dodged by the young man, and sped away terrified at being discovered committing the crime.

"I'll meet you again, sir!" cried the newcomer.

He realized that there had been a human being in that bag and knew that every moment wasted in chasing or talking to the captain might seal the doom of his victim.

The stranger plunged into the water and dove down.

So accurately had he gauged the spot where the bag sunk that when he reached bottom, at a depth of ten feet, he reached the sack and seized it.

The boy inside was fiercely struggling to get out.

In the stranger's hand was clasped an opened pocket-knife, and with one gash he severed the rope binding the mouth of the bag.

The water floated Royal Maxwell from his confinement, for the stones held the bag down, and he received material assistance from the stranger.

Both rose to the surface.

Here the boy struggled frantically again.

He would have gone down again, but for the stranger, who was a magnificent swimmer, and easily held him up.

Royal was gasping stentoriously, and choking from the brine that kept pouring down his throat.

His gallant rescuer, with a few powerful strokes, reached shallow water, and waded ashore, dragging the boy with him.

By the time they reached the strand, Captain Sloat's victim had so far recovered that he was able to stand up.

But he was violently nauseated.

Then he glanced at his rescuer.

"Jack Wright!" he cried, in choking tones.

The brave fellow who pulled him out bent a close look at him.

"Why, it's Royal Maxwell!" he exclaimed in surprise, for he was well acquainted with the boy, as they both lived in the same village and had frequently met.

Jack Wright was a wealthy young inventor of submarine boats, flying machines, and overland engines, besides various other peculiar electrical and mechanical contrivances.

He had a powerful figure, and angular features, dark eyes and black hair, a plucky disposition, a kind heart and a fine education.

He helped the half drowned boy to an overturned rowboat, upon which he seated himself, and Royal Maxwell slowly recovered from his exhaustion, and exclaimed gratefully:

"Mr. Wright, you have saved me from death."

"No doubt of it," assented the young inventor. "Why did this happen?"

"Why? I do not know. All I can tell you is that I stood on the shore here to-night, when something hit me on the head that made me see stars. I fell. That's the last I remember, until I found myself strangling in the water, and you swimming ashore with me."

"You are a victim of foul play."

"But I had nothing about me worth stealing."

"Perhaps there was some other motive in back of it."

"Impossible. I haven't got an enemy who would murder me."

"You might have been mistaken for somebody else."

"True enough. I wonder who could have done it?"

"A sailor," replied Jack. "I saw the man."

"You did?" asked Royal, in deep surprise.

"Certainly. I have been working hard on a new flying machine and just finished building it to-night. Heated from my work, I strolled down to the bayside for a breath of fresh air, when I suddenly caught sight of the sailor I have mentioned. He was carrying a bag on his back and was heading for the dock."

"A bag?"

"Yes. You was in it."

"I was in a bag?" cried the boy in astonishment.

"Exactly. The man's actions were so suspicious that I fol-

lowed him out on the pier to see what he was going to do. Just then I heard a groan come from within the bag. Before I could prevent it he pitched the bag into the water and ran away. I dove in, cut the bag open, pulled you out of it, and carried you ashore."

"By jingo, that's strange!" cried the amazed boy.

"Don't you know who the fellow was?"

"No. He came up behind me, in the gloom, and must have hit me on the head with something, right here, knocking me senseless. This spot on my head hurts like anything."

"What brought you down here, anyway?" asked Jack.

"I wanted to meet a man."

"For what?"

"To get a bird from him."

"I don't understand you——"

"Oh, I forgot. I'll explain. You see I've only got two relations in the world—my father and my father's half-brother—a sea captain named Adam Sloat, who commands that big ship lying at anchor out there in the bay——"

"But your father is away, I believe."

"Yes. One year ago he went to Japan to explore the place in quest of a gold mine, which somebody told him about. I have never heard from him since. Well, before he went away he made out his will. The will stated that if he did not return from his journey in eighteen months it might be taken for granted that he was dead. In that case father's money was to go to me. If I were dead it was to go to Adam Sloat."

"Ah! I see," said Jack, significantly.

"To-night Adam Sloat called on me. He knew all about the arrangement father made about his money, and reminded me of it. He was a rough looking man, but he was very pleasant to me. Before he left he said he had brought me a present from Japan, to where his ship sails. It was a beautiful bird. But he had left it in the boat that carried him ashore. The boat he said was beached near the pier. If I would go down there and ask the sailor for it I could have it. He wasn't going right back to the ship, as he had some business to attend to in the village first, or he would go with me. I told him I'd go after the bird. Then he left. After he was gone I put on my hat and came down here."

"Will you describe Adam Sloat's appearance to me?" asked Jack.

"Certainly. He is a heavily built man, wearing a sea captain's uniform. He has a bushy, black beard, shaggy eyebrows, a hooked nose, and rather small, sharp blue eyes."

"Ah! I recognize him."

"You do?"

"He is the man who tried to kill you."

"What!" cried Royal, in startled tones.

"He wanted to put you out of his way."

"Great heavens! What for?"

"So as to inherit your father's fortune."

"Are you sure it was him?"

"I would be willing to swear to it."

The boy was fairly dumfounded.

He pondered with a frown on his brow, and then said:

"As there was no rowboat here with a man with a bird waiting for me I begin to think he only made up that story so as to get me where nobody would see him, and kill me."

"That's exactly the opinion I have formed."

"Mr. Wright, he must be a terrible villain."

"Money makes rascals out of a good many people."

"Oh, how I wish my poor father were here!"

"Why don't you go in search of him?"

"I can't, as I haven't got the means."

"Why, yes you can. You can go with me if you like."

"With you?"

"In my new flying machine. I intended to make a trip to

Japan in her for pleasure. But if you wish to accompany me I will make an effort to find the lost explorer for you."

"I'll go!" cried the delighted boy. "And here's my hand on it."

CHAPTER II.

UP IN THE AIR MOTOR.

It was very evident to Jack that the captain of the *Fog Bell* had made an attempt to murder the lost explorer's son in order to gain possession of the fortune Charles Maxwell had left.

The dastardly attempt filled the young inventor with indignation, for Jack was too honest and upright to tolerate foul play.

He resolved to see justice done.

"Let us go to the Sea Spider house," said he, after the boy had entirely recovered. "We will there find plenty of the fishermen who will aid us to get aboard the ship and put Adam Sloat under arrest."

"Shall I prosecute him, Mr. Wright?" queried the boy.

"By all means. He is a dangerous man to leave at large. He may come back and try again to kill you if he discovers that his first attempt failed."

"Then come on," hastily said the boy with a shudder. "I'm afraid of that man now. My father has left fifty thousand dollars, and such a large sum might tempt him to repeat his attack."

It was over an hour since Jack saved the boy.

They left the beach and proceeded toward the old hostelry in question, which stood near the bay side.

It was a weather-beaten old tavern frequented by the fishermen of the village, and had been named after the first submarine boat Jack had built.

As they drew close to it the sound of jovial voices, clinking glasses, laughter and boisterous songs were heard within.

Brilliant lights shone out of the doors and windows upon the gloom of the rainy night.

Just as they reached the entrance there suddenly sounded the roar of a hoarse, angry voice in the crowded bar-room, swearing and raving furiously.

The next moment the doors and windows banged open and a motley crowd came pouring out with a rush.

Some jumped through the windows and some crowded out the doors, raising a confused babel of voices.

Then there sounded a pistol shot.

It was evident to Jack that the merriment had suddenly been transformed into a panic by some belligerent individual who had fired that shot.

A moment afterward a voice shouted:

"Missed me, gol darn yer ugly figurehead! Take that fer firin' a shot at me! An' blast yer, may it teach ye ter fight like a man, with yer fists, an' not like an assassin, with a revolver!"

Crash—bang! came the sound of a fall.

It was instantly followed by a volley of frantic yells, oaths and threats in the first voice Jack heard.

Jack recognized the voice of the man who had been shot at.

"It's my old friend, Tim Topstay!" he muttered, in surprise.

A moment later another voice roared:

"Shiminey Christmas! Look out dere, Dim. He vas goin' ter shood ad yer again alretty. Lieber Gott! Look oud!"

Bang! went a second pistol shot.

The Dutchman's voice amazed Jack still more, for he cried:

"I'm blessed if it isn't Fritz Schnelder, too!"

The Dutchman was Jack's other chum.

Realizing that his two friends were engaged in a fight with

an armed man, Jack pushed his way through the crowd and rushed into the saloon.

He saw his two friends recoiling before an armed man.

One glance at this individual plainly showed Jack that he was the same wretch who had made an effort to kill Royal Maxwell that night, down on the pier.

Adam Sloat looked like a wild beast.

He had run directly to this saloon after making the attempt to murder the explorer's son, and began to drink heavily in an effort to forget what he had done.

His small, wicked eyes were flaming and bloodshot, his face was convulsed into a demoniacal expression beneath his bushy black beard, and he was brandishing a big revolver.

It was evident that drink had rendered him half mad.

For an instant Jack stood gazing at the man.

Sloat was then aiming his weapon at Tim.

With a rush Jack reached the man.

One sledge-hammer blow knocked the pistol from his hand, and another caught Sloat on the neck and felled him like a log.

"You cur!" cried the indignant young inventor. "I've been looking for you, and now I'll put you behind the bars."

Sloat scrambled to his feet.

At one glance he recognized Jack.

"That face!" he gasped, recoiling.

"I told you we'd meet again," said Jack.

Just then Royal Maxwell ran in.

"That's the man who tried to murder me!" he cried, excitedly

"My God!" yelled Sloat, starting and paling when his glance fell upon the boy. "The grave gives up its dead!"

"Tim! Fritz!" cried Jack.

"Ay, ay!"

"Vos iss?"

"Arrest that man!"

The sailor and Dutchman rushed for the captain.

Fully alive to his danger, Sloat ran to a window.

With one bound he passed through, and vanished.

"After him!" cried Jack.

He sped out the door, and all the men who had been driven from the saloon started to find the fugitive.

They searched all over.

Sloat was not to be found.

He had not lost a moment escaping.

They scoured the neighborhood, but failed to find him.

"He has probably returned aboard his ship," cried Jack to the men, when they returned to the Sea Spider house. "Follow me. We will board the *Fog Bell*, and put him under arrest!"

Everyone assented.

A rush for the bay was made.

But when they reached the water front an angry roar escaped the crowd.

For the ship was gone!

It was evident that Adam Sloat had returned aboard and set sail at once, impressed with the idea that his life was in danger.

"He has escaped!" cried Jack, in chagrined tones.

"Ay, blast ther lubber," assented Tim, "an' thar's no fetching him back.

There was an angry look upon the old sailor's bearded face, and his eye—for one was glass—gleamed furiously.

He had a wooden leg, and ground it into the sand, as if he wished it were the body of the fugitive Sloat.

"What caused the row, Tim?" questioned Jack.

"Oh, he came in an' got drunk," replied the old marine.

"He started in to insult everybody, an' ther fust thing yer know, I ups wi' my flipper an' caught him a smack in ther kis-

ser when he called me names. Wi' that he pulls a gun an' begun ter shoot.

"Bullets wuz flyin' aroun' ther room like hail-stones. I a couldn't stan' that. So wot should I do, but sock him in ther t'ug. Ther fust punch knocked him cock-eyed. Ther second one sent three o' his teeth flyin' out so swift that they went through the eight-inch walls like bullets. Ther third biff t' caught him in ther bugle an' knocked it up'ards so high that if he gits ketched in a rain storm with his mouth shut, ther water'll run in his nose an' drown him. Ther fourth twister I whanged him knocked his starboard eye out of j'int, an' ther fifth sockdolager broke his back——"

"Hold on, Tim," laughed Jack, who knew what a consummate liar the old sailor was. "If you damaged him so much why didn't he show it in his looks?"

"Why," replied Tim, taking a big chew of navy plug, "you wuz so excited yer didn't notice it, I reckon."

And so saying, the old marine stumped away.

At this juncture Fritz approached.

He was a short, fat Dutchman, with yellow hair, blue eyes, a large stock of pugnacity, no end of grit, and a deep-rooted affection for Jack.

By profession he was an electrician, and for amusement he usually spent his time at grinding an accordeon.

Like the sailor, Fritz had once been befriended by Jack, when he was quite poor; and like Tim, he had amassed a fortune by going with the inventor on his voyages, and sharing his gains.

"Shack," said he, "vot der doost dot drunken veller meant when he say der det coom back by life again?"

Jack told him what happened to Royal Maxwell.

As Tim stood near, he, too, heard the story.

Both were indignant at the captain.

"If ever I fouls that lubber," said the old sailor, "ther Lord hev mercy on him! Thar won't be enough left o' him ter load up a one cent clay pipe, an' don't yer fergit it."

Royal Maxwell now drew near.

"Are you sure that Captain Sloat really went away in his ship?" he asked, in troubled tones. "He may be ashore yet."

"It is not likely that he is yet ashore," replied Jack, "but to avoid any chance of him doing you any further injury, I will take you home with me, my boy."

This assurance greatly relieved the explorer's son.

Ever since his father went away no one had been with him but an old and trusted servant.

He might just as well have been alone in the house for all the protection he could expect from this woman, and he therefore gladly availed himself of Jack's offer.

The young inventor therefore sent word by Fritz to the servant that Royal was going home with him.

Then they proceeded to Jack's handsome residence.

Here the boy was made comfortable for the night.

By the following morning he was fully recovered, and after breakfast went out to Jack's workshop to look at his new flying machine in which they were to make the voyage.

It was a most singular looking iron-clad air motor, and stood in the middle of the big room in which it was built.

The body of the machine was shaped like a flat boat.

Her length was 200 feet, her beam 25, and the depth about six.

Beneath the long bowsprit hung the rudder, on the forward part of the railed deck stood a wheelhouse, in the middle section was a large machinery compartment, with an enormous helix on top and from either side there projected two tremendous metal wings.

Each quarter of the boat was furnished with three slanted hollow tubes at the points of which four bladed propellers were attached, under the keel there was an enormous folding center board, and at the stern a tremendous driving wheel.

Royal contemplated the motor in astonishment.

It was the most unusual looking aerostat ever invented.

"Do you mean to say that this thing will fly?" he asked.

"Most assuredly," replied Jack. "We start in her to-morrow for Japan."

He took the boy aboard and showed him the interior arrangement.

The entire mechanism operated by means of electric storage batteries of high voltage, generated by chemicals of Jack's invention.

Everything was governed by means of levers in the wheel-house.

The central cone was divided into three compartments.

In the first the cooking, dining and sleeping were done; in the second were stored provisions, various kinds of supplies, and arms and ammunition; in the third the complicated machinery for working the wings and helix.

The body of the boat was used to hold water and the battery cells.

Every arrangement was complete.

Nothing remained to be done save to stock the machine.

This was accordingly done that day.

On the following morning the four went into the shop, the movable roof was opened, and everyone went aboard the Dragon, as the airship was named.

Jack entered the pilot-house.

Pulling a lever that started the electric current into the helix, the great wheel spun around, and lifted the motor up in the air.

Through the opening in the roof she soared like a bird, and a tremendous shout arose from the villagers who saw her

Up, up, she continued to go until she attained a height of 1,000 feet, when Jack stopped her ascent, regulated the helix to hold her at that height, and pulling another lever he started the screws and she shot ahead.

CHAPTER III.

A DANGEROUS FALL.

It was a fine, clear morning, the sun was just rising over the broad Atlantic in the east, the azure sky flecked with white, fleecy clouds, and a gentle breeze blowing from the southeast.

Below the panorama was beautiful beyond all description.

The air-motor rode as steady as a railway train.

Her helix was spinning just fast enough to maintain her at the altitude at which she paused, and the tube screws and the big driving wheel were rapidly pushing her through the air.

The great wings were extended, acting like parachutes upon the atmosphere, to buoy and steady the Dragon, and her great centerboard went down, resisting the atmosphere in a direction contrary to that in which her screws drove her, to prevent leaway being made.

A buzzing sound arose from the flying wheels as she shot ahead at a pace of forty miles an hour.

Jack looked satisfied at once.

He had spent thousands of dollars constructing her, and had been in a state of painful suspense to learn if she would operate in the manner her model promised.

Now all doubts were at rest.

The machine was a perfect success.

To people on earth she looked like an enormous bird.

"Well?" asked Tim, approaching the window.

"Better than anything I have yet invented," said Jack.

"Donner vetter," cried Fritz. "She cut de air like a knife." Royal Maxwell had turned as pale as death.

It made him dizzy; faint and sick in that strange situation. He grasped the railing and glared down at the ground with an irresistible desire to spring off.

His brain swam, his body shook like an aspen, and he finally made up his mind to get inside.

As he started to cross the deck it began to sway.

The boy tottered and fell, uttering a scream of alarm.

His body rolled through one of the openings in the railing, and in a moment more he felt himself falling downward.

He flung out his hands convulsively.

His fingers clutched one of the wing stays.

It checked his fall, and left him hanging by the slender line.

Jack had been the first to see what had befallen him.

"Take the wheel!" he cried.

Then he dashed out of the pilot-house.

Fritz rushed in and assumed control of the motor.

Over to the side sped Jack until he arrived opposite the boy, who now hung like a pendulum, swaying from the stay.

"Hang on!" cried Jack.

"Save me!" groaned the boy.

"Yes—yes. I'll have you in a moment."

It was a perilous undertaking to get the boy.

The stay sagged far down and bent down the tip of the wing when his weight came upon it.

It tilted the motor over at an angle.

In order to reach him Jack was forced to grasp the stay and let himself hang down as the boy was, then go out hand over hand toward the center.

His additional weight tilted the Dragon over further.

In a minute more he reached Royal and grasped him.

It was lucky he did.

The boy was going to let go.

He was so overcome with panic that his strength departed.

"Tim! Help me! He has fainted."

"Aye, ay, lad. I'll heave you a rope."

There were several manilla lines hanging to the rail, and seizing one, Tim made a slip noose in the end and flung it over to the young inventor.

Jack could not catch it then, for Royal's senses had fled, and while the young inventor held on to his limp body with one hand, he sustained himself by the stay with the other.

"Lower the Dragon to the ground! Quick!" he cried.

It was impossible to get any help from the deck now.

Fritz heard the cry.

He at once reversed the helix lever and stopped the screws.

While the onward progress of the flying machine was stopped the slackened speed of the helix caused her to descend swiftly.

Jack was hanging on by one hand.

It strained his muscles frightfully.

He glanced down, and saw a dense woods below.

Before the air motor could get across he feared he would have to let go, and he shouted up to Fritz:

"Drop her into the first opening you see!"

"Sure!" replied the fat youth.

Down she went until she was within a few feet of the tree tops.

Here Fritz endeavored to stop her descent.

But he did not gauge the distance right.

Jack struck the topmost branches.

As the air motor crept ahead they caught his body.

He was pulled from his hold and fell.

Had he remained the branches would have gashed him like knives.

Down fell Jack with his burden with a crashing and crackling noise, until he struck in the crotch of a bough.

Relieved of their weight, the Dragon bounded upward and sped away from the spot.

Jack was severely cut and scratched.

So was his companion, to whom he yet clung.

Fortunately for them they were not killed by going all the way to the ground, or by being impaled on the broken point of one of the limbs.

In a few moments Jack recovered his faculties.

He ached all over, and soon ascertained the extent of the damage.

With his strength recuperated he worked his way down to the ground with the senseless boy after considerable difficulty.

"By jingo!" he gasped, "it was awful—awful!"

Royal was beginning to show signs of returning animation.

In a few minutes he recovered and sat up.

Staring blankly at Jack, he began to think.

Then it recurred to his mind what peril he had been in.

A surprised look crossed his face when he saw where he was.

"Why—how is this?" he stammered.

"We fell in a tree," replied Jack.

"Oh, my, don't I hurt!"

"No wonder; it's queer you ain't dead."

"How did I get all scratched and torn this way?"

Jack told him as briefly as possible.

By the time he finished he caught sight of the Dragon.

She was hovering over their heads.

"Ahoy there!" he cried.

His voice reached Fritz's ears and the Dragon paused.

"Hello thar, Jack!" roared Tim from the motor's deck.

"We are down here!"

"Hurt?"

"Not much."

"Good. I'll heave down a ladder."

"Let it come, and we'll get up there again."

Down through the nearest opening among the trees descended a long silk ladder with two heavy weights on the end. They held it rigid while Jack and the boy ascended.

Reaching the deck of the air motor, Tim helped them aboard.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed the old sailor. "I thought yer wuz killed."

"But we wasn't!" laughed Jack. "Haul up the ladder and start her off."

"It all came o' Fritz miscalkerlatin' how near yer wuz ter ther trees."

"No, it was my fault," interposed Royal. "I became awful dizzy. Then I fell. Rolling off the deck, I grabbed that line."

"It's because you are not used to flying in the air," explained Jack.

"Do you think I'll get accustomed to it?" anxiously asked the boy.

"Of course you will, once we get above the clouds. But come inside and we'll repair the damage our bodies have undergone."

He led the way to the central turret.

As he opened the door, they were startled by hearing a prolonged howl, followed instantly by a hoarse, rasping voice, yelling:

"Blast you! Confound you! Oh, holy smoke! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Good heaven! Who's that?" gasped Royal, in astonishment.

Jack burst out laughing, and pointed at a monkey and parrot, who were engaged in a terrific scuffle in the middle of the room.

It was the monkey that yelled, and the parrot who spoke.

"Bismarck and Whiskers!" said Jack.

"Who in the world are they?"

"That bird and beast."

"Where did they come from?"

"My house. Tim owns the monkey, and Fritz owns Bismarck."

"Where did they get them?"

"Captured them in Africa. They always go with us."

The boy laughed at the antics of the two creatures, and went in with Jack to dress his wounds.

Fritz had started the screws revolving, and as the Dragon ran ahead, she kept mounting in the air.

Finally she reached the clouds, and passed into a bank.

They were thin and so vapory that the air motor looked as if she had been in a shower of rain.

The clouds were several hundred feet in thickness, and the motor steadily mounted through them till they were left below.

A broad glare of sunshine fell upon her.

A most singular scene was seen beneath.

Falling upon the top of the cloud bank, the sunlight lent it the appearance of a billowy ocean.

Great pinnacles, hills and ragged projections rose above the general level, flashing back the sun's rays in beautiful prismatic hues as the golden shafts pierced the misty vapor.

The air current was driving the cloud along in the same direction in which the motor was going.

But as the cloud traveled as fast as the wind, it swiftly left the Dragon behind.

Along it swiftly fled, the air motor chasing it with flying propellers, but it soon vanished in the distance.

There were numerous gauges, registers and other instruments hanging upon the wall of the pilot-house by means of which the height, velocity, etc., were taken.

Fritz thus ascertained that the Dragon reached a height of 2,000 feet above the sea level when he stopped her.

The log showed a speed of forty geographical miles an hour, and a register showed the distance already traversed.

Jack and Royal now came in and the course was laid out.

The Dragon was to pass over the Canadian border to Quebec, thence along the north of the great lakes to Ontario, and crossing Manitoba, Assiniboia, Alberta and British Columbia at Van Couver's Island, she was to cross the Pacific to Japan.

Jack's main object had been a mere pleasure trip over grounds with which he was not very familiar, and the original project was to be carried out.

The only deviation was to be the mere fact that they were to look for Charles Maxwell when they reached Japan.

Royal had some account of his father's movements, and when the course of the air motor was shaped for the frontier, Jack took control of the wheel and said:

"Fritz, it's pretty near midday. As you have always done the cooking on our former expeditions, will you assume the same duty now and prepare our luncheon?"

"Fer sure," assented the young Dutchman, hastening away.

"Tim, keep a lookout now, will you? I want to hold a few moments' conversation with Royal."

"Ay, ay!" replied the sea-dog, saluting.

"Now, my boy, I want you to tell me all the particulars of your father's exploring expedition, and give me what information you can in order to guide us to his present whereabouts."

Royal nodded assent.

"I'll give you the whole story, Mr. Wright," said he.

CHAPTER IV.

SWALLOWED BY A THUNDER GUST.

Jack stood with his hands on the wheel and Royal seated himself on a camp stool and said:

"My father was a prominent member of the American Geographical Society. In the interest of that association he made up his mind to explore the islands of Japan from end to end. He was further prompted by a most peculiar fact. That was his desire to definitely locate a gold mine by which he hoped to increase his wealth."

"How did he chance to know of the existence of that mine?" asked Jack.

"Through the result of an accident. He once saved the life of a man who had been the secretary of the American minister to Japan. The man's horse ran away and my father stopped it. The secretary was very grateful. He never recovered from the shock of the accident. Finding himself dying, and having no relatives to benefit, he sent for my father and imparted the secret to him of where he had once, when in Japan, discovered a valuable lead."

"Ah, I see. Go on."

"My father resolved to find it," said Royal. "He therefore started for Japan just about a year ago. From Yokohama he sent me this letter, mapping out the course he intended to follow. You know how the Japanese hate all foreigners, how jealously they guard their own possessions, and how antagonistic some of the governors are to the white race. Well, as I never heard from my father again, I came to the conclusion that he had fallen victim of the Japs, and would never come back alive."

"Let me see the letter."

Royal handed it over.

Jack carefully read it.

The letter contained a description of the route Charles Maxwell intended to follow, and was a splendid clew for Jack.

He saw that by going over exactly the same course, he might gain some tidings of the lost explorer that would lead to his ultimate recovery if he was yet living.

Without this information Jack would have had a very difficult task to locate the explorer.

"Let—me—see," he muttered. "He intended to land at Yokohama, and thence go afoot through Musash, Kozuke and Iwashiro to Inawa Sharo lake. It must be there that the mine is located."

"And the course, you can see, is marked with blue pencil."

"Yes—all the adjacent towns and cities are written here. It would be almost impossible to miss the route once we reach Yokohama."

"But you are not going directly there?"

"No; our destination is Cape Satano, on Van Dieman's Strait."

At this juncture Fritz rang an electric call bell to announce dinner, and the conversation was brought to an end.

An excellent meal was served up.

Jack was finally relieved of the wheel, and opening a trap in the deck, when he had finished his luncheon, he went down into the hold of the motor to examine the machinery.

The space was not deep enough to permit him to stand upright.

By pressing a button on the wall he caused a number of incandescent electric lights to glow.

They were operated by the batteries.

He found himself in a large, shallow compartment, over the floor of which lay the mechanism for operating the machine.

It consisted of a number of cranks, shafts, cogged-wheels and electric motors, from which wires ran to the batteries.

This machinery operated the side screws and driving wheel.

The helix and wings were controlled by the mechanism in the central turret, while the electric lighting power for the search-light at the bow and the incandescent lamps came direct from the jars.

Jack soon saw that everything was working with the nicety of a clock, and having lubricated the bearings, passed up forward.

Here the battery jars were arranged in compartments, and joined in series, so that different strengths of current could be gained, or different sets be worked independently.

The chemical compounds with which they were charged did not require changing for several days.

Having seen that the batteries were in perfect order, Jack started to go back to the trap, when a loud, cracking noise rattled out.

Turning around he was startled to see a number of fiery streaks go shooting along the metal frame points.

At the same moment he received an electric shock through his hands where they were in contact with the wall.

It knocked him down as if he were struck by a club.

A cry of alarm escaped him.

In a moment more his body felt the current.

He bounded to his feet.

Then he saw the machinery stop.

The stoppage of the helix caused the air motor to fall.

A sickening feeling passed through the young inventor as he felt the air-ship descending.

The snapping and cracking continued and grew in violence.

In a few moments the hold resounded with a noise much as if packs of firecrackers were bursting.

Thousands of electric sparks and blazing streaks shot from the metal rivets, plates and nuts through the air, in all directions, filling the place with a lurid, ghastly glow.

Every time one of those glaring fireballs touched Jack they burnt his clothing and skin.

He made a rush for the trap.

Death stared him in the face.

If any of those sparks were to touch a vital spot the effect would have been much the same as if he were struck by lightning.

Before Jack reached the trap there came a shock.

It flung him down.

The swift descent of the Dragon was stopped.

Tingling all over from a second shock, the young inventor quickly arose and sped up to the deck.

Here he saw that all the wheels had stopped.

The motor was falling earthward with her spread wings buoying her like a parachute.

Fritz and Tim were yelling for him.

"What's the matter?" he shouted.

"Dot's vot I vant to know," replied Fritz.

"Look at your registers."

"Dey don't register noddings."

"Then the current is escaping from the jars."

"Vot in dunder make dot?"

"I can't find out. Switch off into the grounding wheel."

Fritz complied.

There was a wheel on top of the central turret.

It lay in a horizontal position, and was arranged to take every bit of current there was and discharge it in the air.

The electricity caused it to revolve furiously, and a shower of sparks and streaks of lightning five yards in length flew off into the air.

By this means the current was drawn from the hull.

Down sank the air motor toward the ground, her weight bearing her downward, and her spread wings being pressed upward by the atmosphere through which they were descending.

Fritz pulled the centerboard lever, causing it to fold up, and a few moments afterward the Dragon alighted.

The shock was nothing near as heavy as Jack anticipated, and this was due, strangely as it may appear, to her great weight.

For this reason:

The greater the weight, the stronger the resistance of the wings.

She laid in the midst of a farm.

The owner of the place and all his help had seen the motor coming down with feelings of intense apprehension.

Taking to their heels, they ran for the farm-house.

"We've frightened the wits out of them!" laughed Royal, as he pointed at the flying rustics.

"Ay! they imagines as we is some evil sperrits a-swoopin' down from ther sky," chuckled Tim.

"Let's see if we can't find out what ails the Dragon!" Jack exclaimed. "All the current is being drawn off now."

"Id vos lucky dot ve half wings, like a chicken," said Fritz, in grim tones. "If ve ditn'd somepody would collect our lifes insurance."

Jack passed into the hold with the Dutchman.

All the fiery globules had disappeared excepting a lurid, bluish red gleam amid the jars of the battery.

It was there the electric fluid was escaping.

Upon a closer approach Jack saw that he had created the mischief himself by stepping on one of the feed wires and breaking it in two.

All the current had thus been thrown into the boat's hull.

Procuring a pair of rubber gloves, the breach was mended.

Returning to the pilot-house, Jack saw the farmer and his hands in the windows of the old house.

They were armed with a shotgun and several antiquated horse pistols, with which they were firing vigorously at the air motor at such long range that none of the bullets reached her.

A general laugh went up from our friends over their animosity, and Jack put the machinery in motion again.

The helix spun around, and the Dragon arose swiftly in the air to a height of 1,500 feet.

Here a strong current of air was encountered blowing to the northwest, and Jack stopped her ascent and started the screws.

The motor sped away with the wind.

By nightfall she was going over Lake Champlain, and heading rapidly for Quebec.

The sky had a threatening look.

"I have a notion that we are going toward a storm center," said Jack to Tim that night, as they stood in the wheel house together. "Don't you notice the barometer?"

"Ay, ay—ther mercury's been a-fallin', my lad."

"I've seen it go down three-fourths of an inch in an hour."

"Bless me—as much as that?"

"It's the surest indication of a big storm, Tim."

"True for you, my hearty. Looker ther sky yonder."

He pointed to the northward.

It looked as if the current of cloud-laden air they were in, as well as one from the east and another from the west, were converging toward a fixed point on the Canadian shore of Lake Ontario.

The air motor was then driving along at the rate of a mile a minute.

Jack examined the spot toward which his attention was directed.

It had a gloomy, threatening aspect.

"Tim, it won't do to remain here!" exclaimed Jack.

"Wot will yer do—rise or fall?"

"I'm going up over it."

"Ay, now, that's ther safest."

"If we were to get caught in the midst of that atmospheric disturbance, it might rend the Dragon to pieces."

"Thar's a power in ther wind an' clouds wot's ter be feared," the old man assented soberly.

Jack increased the speed of the helix.

He permitted it to carry them up five hundred feet higher.

At this altitude they left the air current which they had been traversing, but unfortunately kept on in the same direction.

Below the Dragon the black cloud banks were rushing along swiftly, and within a few moments struck the two opposing currents.

The effect was frightful.

A deafening thunder clap pealed out.

Numerous shafts of lightning flashed from the meeting clouds in all directions with dazzling brilliancy.

The awful glare and concussion made Jack's brain reel.

In another moment the conflicting clouds bounded upward and enveloped the air motor.

Lightning was zig-zagging all around her, and growling thunder claps following each other in rapid succession made her shake, toss, and roll frightfully.

The clouds took on a fearful rotary motion.

Carrying the Dragon with them, they began to whirl as they swept along, and the air motor was spun around like a top.

CHAPTER V.

A NIMROD OF THE WOODS.

"Take the wheel, or we are lost!" shrieked Jack.

"Jerusalem ther golden! We're a-goin' ter capsize."

"Don't you lose your wits, Tim."

"Rely on me, Jack."

"We must sink her. The cloud is descending."

"You manage ther levers then!"

The wings were causing all the mischief.

It was possible to fold them in by going out on deck in the fierce storm and hauling them in by their backstays.

But it was a most hazardous undertaking, for the wind was then shrieking around the air motor like a legion of fiends, the rotary motion made her crew giddy, and the awful ebullition going on threatened to sweep them into eternity.

Jack saw that their only salvation was to get the wings in. They worked on ball and socket joints.

Consequently, under ordinary circumstances it would have been a very easy matter to furl them.

Jack slackened the speed of the helix and said:

"I'm going out on deck to haul the planes in."

"Don't yer do it alone!" warningly cried Tim.

"I'll call up Fritz to help me."

"Ay, an' reeve life lines."

There was a telephone in the room.

It communicated with the central turret.

"Fritz!" screamed Jack.

"Yah! Yah!" came the reply.

"Stand by to help me."

"I vos retty."

"Get a rope—quick!"

"In vun minutes."

Pushing open the door, Jack made a rush for the railing.

Every time a gust of wind flew under the wings, the motor almost turned over.

She was going around with appalling speed now.

Jack reached the rail in safety.

By clinging to it he finally worked his way along to a point where the turnbuckles held the forward braces.

Unhooking the one in front of him, he motioned to Fritz, who stood in a doorway, to do the same on the other side.

As soon as this was done both Jack and the Dutchman got back into the central turret.

The wings began to pound frightfully, every thump shaking the boat as if it would go to pieces.

Fritz had a rope.

Fastening one end around his body, Jack walked out, leaving the other end of the line in the fat fellow's hand.

It was as much as he could do to keep his footing on the surging deck, but he struggled aft and hauled in the back stay.

The starboard wing came with it.

As the wind was puffing against the other one, it heeled the motor far over, threatening momentarily to capsize her.

No time was to be lost now.

The furious gusts were coming rapidly.

Jack hooked the wing in at the side.

He then rushed across the deck for the other stay.

A violent plunge of the Dragon flung him over, and as his body shot down the incline of the deck, he would have gone all the way to the ground but for the rope.

There he hung over the side swaying like a pendulum.

Jack did not remain there long, for the Dutchman called on Royal to assist him and they hauled the inventor up again.

Once he reached the deck he made a second attempt to reach the stay, and finally succeeded.

Dragging it in, he hooked it on the side.

The fierce plunging of the Dragon ceased, and her descent became more rapid.

She shot through the cloud like a stone.

A fierce streak of lightning whizzed out of the mist, and glancing along the side, tore away the railing.

It was much as if the storm was firing a parting shot at the air motor, for in another moment she dropped from the cloud into a deluge of rain.

Jack looked up, and seeing that they were out of it, and the movements of the airmotor more regular, he yelled:

"Stop her descent, Tim!"

"Stop it is," replied the old sailor, obeying.

"Drive her to the westward!"

"Westward she goes!" answered Tim, spinning the wheel.

Although the motor's wings were folded in now, she went ahead as buoyantly as ever she did.

In fifteen minutes she left the storm behind, and the moon and stars appeared in the blue sky.

The dark waters of Lake Ontario appeared below.

Jack went out, and assisted by Fritz and Royal, spread the wings again, as they were a great safeguard against a sudden fall from the sky in case the machinery gave out.

The explorer's son had taken a great fancy to Tim.

He went into the pilot-house and stood watching the old sailor managing the wheel, and then said to him:

"This is an awful dangerous way to travel, ain't it, Tim?"

"Dangerous?" scornfully asked the old sailor. "Why this ain't nuthin' ter travelin' in a ship on ther ocean."

"I suppose you have been on a good many ships, haven't you?"

"Lor' bless yer innercent heart, I wuz borned an' brung up in 'em. Speakin' o' danger reminds me o' a leetle incident wot once happened ter me when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash in ther navy. Would yer like ter hear about it?"

"Yes, yes," delightedly replied the boy.

"Waal," drawled Tim, as he took a bite of plug. "Yer see it happened this way: We wuz anchored of ther coast o' Sweden one night, when all at onct a gale struck us an' sent me overboard. Ther frigate went over on her beam ends, an' as she had all sail sot, she scudded away before ther gale like a race horse. As all my messmates wuz asleep in thar hammocks on ther gun-deck, an' I wuz the only man on duty, I naturally wuz anxious ter git back on ther frigate ter prewent her goin' ter pieces on ther rock coast. She wuz headin' right straight fer it too! In less'n five minutes she wuz bound ter strike. It made me nervous, 'cause I knowed werry well as none o' ther crew would wake up an' man ther wheel in time ter save her."

"Gee!" exclaimed Royal, who was deeply interested. "What happened?"

"Waal, strange as it may seem, I saved her, although she wuz rushin' away from me at ther rate o' twenty knots an hour afore ther gale," said Tim. "It happened this way. Yer know wot a sea gull is, don't yer? It's a powerful big bird wot

lives on fishes. Waal, sir, along come one o' them ere birds when ther Wabash wuz about forty miles away ter leeward. Ther bird thought I wuz a fish, an' swooped down ter swaller me. I grabbed it by ther leg, an' it took fright an' flewed up in the air wi' me. Scein' as it wuz goin' away from ther frigate, a good plan come inter my mind. I hung onter ther leg wi' one hand an' twisted its tail aroun' wi' the other. That made it steer in ther direction wot I wanted ter foller. Away she went, an' by steerin' that bird by its tail I made it fly toward the frigate——"

"Good enough," breathlessly cried the boy.

"Ay, now, an' in a few seconds we reached ther frigate," proceeded Tim, delighted to see how the boy swallowed his lies. "Waal, sir, ther Wabash wuz jist rushin' towards ther rocks, an' in one minute more would astruck. But jist then I hoisted up ther bird's tail, an' down she went towards ther frigate's deck. As soon as I touched ther planks I let ther bird go, an' she flewed away. I jist had time to grab her wheel an' steer ther frigate off ter ther west'ard ter perwent her runnin' aground, an' ther vessel was saved."

"Didn't any of the crew wake up?" asked Royal, in astonishment.

"Not a lubber, until ther danger wuz all over," declared Tim. "Now yer talk about this ere air flyin' bein' dangerous, wot d'yer think o' ther perils a feller meets on ther sea—eh?"

"It must have been awful," said Royal.

He pondered a moment, and then he suddenly asked:

"Say, Tim, if the frigate was anchored before the storm she would not have had her sails up, would she? Besides, how could she sail away if her anchor was out? Then you said you were the only one on deck. I thought there was always a watch of a number of men. And it seems strange that all hands would sleep while a heavy storm was——"

"Avast thar!" interposed Tim. "If yer asks a lot o' silly questions, I ain't a-goin' ter spin yer no more yarns, my lad!"

The boy said no more.

He greatly enjoyed the old sailor's stories, and fearing that Tim would tell him no more, he wisely refrained from pressing his questions.

The air motor sped along all night along the great lakes.

She passed over the Canadian country, and two days afterwards settled down in a great forest to lay in some fresh water from a stream Jack had seen flowing below.

Alighting beside the stream, the water tanks were quickly filled.

This had scarcely been accomplished when the report of a rifle was heard in the woods and a bullet flew past Jack's head.

It was followed by a crackling and crashing among the underbrush and the voice of a man grumbling.

"Get aboard!" exclaimed Jack to his companions. "We are attacked. Hurry or someone will get shot."

A rush was made for the Dragon.

Every one but Jack got upon the deck, when the bushes parted and a grizzled old hunter and trapper, in a coonskin cap and buckskin clothing, appeared with a Winchester in his hand.

He had long, unkempt hair, a gray beard and a sunburned face which now assumed a look of intense astonishment when his sharp, gray eyes rested upon the air motor.

"Great snakes!" he roared, coming to a sudden pause. "What on arth be that ere pesky object?"

Jack saw that he had his alarm in vain.

"Did you just shoot at us?" he demanded.

"Me? Well, great frogs, no! What shed I do thet fur?"

"A ball just came from your gun within an inch of my head."

"Do tell? Now, may I be cussed fer a Cherokee ef I ain't lovin' my holt on this yere ole shootin'-iron. Why, I fired at the biggest buck moose whut ever you seen in ther back-

woods, an' missed him. I'm ashamed of myself; couldn't hit ther side of a barn nohow ten paces off."

"The ball you fired at the moose was the one that nearly hit me, ch?"

"That's about the size of it. Only had one cartridge in my gun. Now the critter's headin' for the plains, and I'm fooled. Gosh hang my ole puddin' head, how on arth could I have missed thet shot?"

The old fellow looked chagrined enough to weep.

Jack turned the matter over in his mind a moment, and then said:

"See here—do you want that moose badly?"

"Do I? Great ham, man alive, I wuz jest dyin' to drop him."

"Get aboard, and I'll catch the beast for you."

"But what in the name of blue Peter be thet consarn?"

"A flying machine."

"What! A sort of balloon?"

"Exactly."

"Hang my buttons if I don't try it."

"Which way did the moose go?"

"To'ards ther settin' sun."

"Come on, then, and see if we can't overtake it."

The old fellow got aboard rather gingerly, for he rather mistrusted the curious machine, and Jack went with him.

"Tim!" called the young inventor. "Raise her and head for the plains."

The old sailor complied.

As the Dragon shot upward over the tree tops, the old nimrod suddenly became frightened.

He made a rush for the side to jump off.

"Great snakes!" he howled. "Mild up thar. Le'me git off. Consarn ye, I d'wanter go. Stop her, d'yer hear me!"

He grasped the railing and began to climb over when Jack made a rush for him and seized him by the arm.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YELLOW MUTINEERS.

"Madman! Do you want to commit suicide?"

"Dang my pictur', if I want ter stay yere."

"You'll break your neck if you leap off."

"Then let ther consarned machine down again."

"Wait till we reach the plain. You are safe enough."

"Great beeswax! So I be! But she may bust an' tumble."

"No danger," laughed Jack. "Keep quiet a few moments."

The old hunter was somewhat reassured by Jack's words, and climbed back to the deck, keeping a wary eye on the buzzing wheels and the ground below.

Over the tree tops flew the Dragon.

She soon reached the plain, and Tim yelled from the wheel-house:

"Thar go ther moose!"

Everyone glanced ahead of the air motor and beheld a plain over which two magnificent bucks were rushing.

They were the largest existing species of the deer family, being six feet in height at the shoulders, with large horns, and were covered with brownish-black brittle hair.

Their cloven hoofs made a clattering sound as they swiftly galloped away, their heads were protruded, the horns laying back upon their necks, and they went with great rapidity.

A yell of delight burst from the old hunter's lips.

"Whar's my gun?" he roared, forgetting all fear in the momentary excitement of seeing his prey. "Them's the ones. May I be roasted if they ain't. Oh, great grasshoppers, who expected this?"

"Hold on, and I'll show you some fun! They can't get away," said Jack, restraining him, as he seized his weapon to fire.

"But the varinints may git away again."

"It's impossible," said Jack.

"Shall I veer arter 'em?" shouted the sailor.

"Yes, drop the machine to within six feet of the ground!"

The Dragon shot ahead like a rocket, and leaving the trees behind, she sank close to the level ground.

Here she skimmed along in hot pursuit of the deers.

With the earth so close at hand, the old hunter felt more comfortable, and rushed up in the bow.

The flying machine was going like a gunshot now.

In a few moments she reached the moose.

The timid animals heard and saw her.

Filled with fright, they rushed along at a tremendous pace to escape the motor, but failed.

Steadily she glided up until her bowsprit ran between them.

The old hunter gave a yell of delight.

Before anybody could stop him he vaulted over the rail and landed astride of the nearest buck.

A hoarse cry of alarm escaped it.

Swinging around, the beast darted off at an angle with the course it had been pursuing, carrying the hunter with it.

Tim kept the Dragon on after the other animal, and in a few moments the mounted nimrod faded from view in the distance.

On swept the buck, and the aerial vessel rushed along beside it, when Jack saw that its strength was giving out.

"It will soon drop from terror and exhaustion. I'll end its misery!" he muttered compassionately.

His heart was touched by its heroic efforts to escape.

Drawing a pistol from his belt, he fired at the beast.

It bounded in the air and fell dead.

"Stop the Dragon, Tim!"

"Ay, ay, lad. That wuz a good shot!"

"Donnerwetter! I couldn'd done petter meinselluf!" cried Fritz.

The wheels paused, and the motor landed.

Jack ran back to the moose and bled it.

The skin was taken off, the choicest of its venison was secured, and carrying the delicious meat aboard, Jack stored it away in the refrigerator for future consumption.

Afterwards the air motor was raised a few feet from the ground, and resumed her journey, everyone wondering what became of the old hunter.

On the following day the Dragon reached the Pacific and glided away from land, a few yards above the heaving ocean.

It was a clear, beautiful day, and the sea was dotted in several places with the sails of ships.

Jack observed the crews of the different vessels they passed, levelling spy-glasses at them as they went by.

The appearance of the air motor created the most intense astonishment wherever she was seen.

Far in the distance ahead, a large Pacific Mail steamer was seen bearing away for China, and as she laid directly in the Dragon's course Jack did not deviate an inch.

He steered the motor straight ahead, and although the steamship was making about eighteen knots an hour, the flying machine began to rapidly overhaul her.

"We'll give that crew a surprise," said Jack to the Dutchman.

"Das vos goot," chuckled Fritz. "I loaf me to seen by deir faces dem looks like if dey vos a firs going to haf alretty."

"Don't it look to you as if there were a lot of the men warming up in the rigging and clustered aft there?"

"Yah! dot looks so."

"What are they doing it for?"

"Mebbe to seen us petter."

"I don't agree with your idea."

"Vhy not?"

"It's something more serious."

"Ach, vat you tink?"

"A fight."

"How you know dot?"

"Don't you see the smoke clouds puff up?"

"It comes from pistols or rifles."

"Fer sure; so dey vas."

"Shiminey Christmas! You vas right."

As Fritz said this he applied a binocular to his eye.

He now plainly saw that there was trouble on the ship.

The men in the rigging of the mainmast and the ones who were clustered aft seemed to be firing at the windows of the deck houses.

Very much surprised at this warlike demonstration, Jack hurried the Dragon along.

She was soon seen by the people on the steamer.

They pointed toward the air motor and evinced in various ways that they had seen her and were surprised at her appearance.

On went the Dragon until she reached the vessel.

Here Jack raised her up over the steamer, and grading her speed to agree with that of the steamer, he said:

"Manage her, Fritz, until I find out what's going on down there."

The young Dutchman grasped the wheel.

Jack then went on deck.

"Steamer ahoy!" he shouted down over the rail.

"Ahoy!" responded one of the men, who seemed to be the captain.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Jack.

"A gang of coolies is trying to seize the steamer."

"How is that?"

"We shipped them in San Francisco for Hong Kong. It was probably a piratical gang. They must have had all their plans laid to seize the vessel. Upon the first attack we repulsed them. They have possession of the interior of the steamer now, and have been firing at us."

"Then they have the advantage?"

"Yes, for they control the food, water and machinery."

"Can't you get them out?"

"No. We are in despair."

"I can assist you then."

"For heaven's sake, do so. But what is that machine?"

"An iron-clad air motor of my own invention."

"It's a wonderful contrivance. But what can you do for us?"

"I shall have to demolish the roof of your deck-house."

"That makes no difference. Go ahead."

"Is the fore-castle open?"

"It is."

"Get all hands into it."

"What for?"

"To escape injury from bombs."

"Ah, I see! We'll be ready in a minute."

The captain had no need of telling the men what to do.

All hands had heard what was said, and went below.

Jack then called Tim and Royal and told them to aid him. Procuring a number of hand grenades, loaded with a terrific explosive Jack invented, they went to the railing and began to hurl them down at the deck house roof.

The first volley created an awful intonation.

As the grenades burst they tore the roof off the deck house, and sent the splintered wood flying in all directions.

In a few moments it was demolished.

From within there came a chorus of wild yells in the excited voices of the Chinese.

As soon as the saloon was unroofed, Jack and his companions saw three score of the coolies thronging the interior of the cabin.

Down went a shower of the bombs in their midst, the deafening reports roaring out like artillery.

The yellow mutineers were mowed down right and left.

Some were killed and others wounded by the flying particles of the burst shells.

They rushed away in all directions to escape the dreadful downpour of missiles, as soon as they saw the air motor hovering in the sky over the steamer.

A terrible uproar ensued.

"That will do. Let us descend into the ship now, and complete the work in our armor," said Jack.

Tim and the boy followed him into the store room, and they each put on a suit of aluminum, and arming themselves, they took a silk ladder, went out, dropped it to the steamer's deck, and descended.

CHAPTER VII.

LAND OF THE RISING SUN.

The armor worn by Jack and his companions was very light, but perfectly bullet proof.

Helmets protected their heads and gauntlets their hands, and they carried magazine air rifles that threw bomb-like projectiles almost as destructive as the grenades which they hurled down at the coolies.

Upon reaching the deck, Jack hurled a grenade at the saloon door, and the explosion smashed it to fragments.

The way was open for them to enter now.

All the Chinamen had taken refuge down in the cabin.

Rushing down the stairs, Jack soon saw them.

They were crouching behind the furniture, crowded into the passages and staterooms, and filled the pantry and lockers.

"Give them a round!" exclaimed Jack.

Three shots were fired noiselessly.

When the bullets struck they exploded.

A wild howl pealed from the desperate mutineers.

They were all armed with revolvers, and fired a fusillade back at the three most viciously.

None of the bullets penetrated their suits of armor, much to the terror and astonishment of the Chinamen, and a second volley was discharged into their midst.

Rendered furious with desperation, they all left their coverts, and made a rush for the three from all directions.

"Fire again!" cried Jack, in ringing tones.

This time they did not pause until each had discharged five shots, and a man fell for every one fired.

It checked the majority of them and spoiled the sortie.

Some of them kept on, however.

When they reached the armored trio, they fiercely engaged them in a hand to hand conflict.

Not a blow was felt by our friends, while every one they dealt the coolies had a powerful effect.

Taking courage, the rest of them rushed toward the gallant trio to lend assistance to their friends.

It might have gone hard with Jack and his two companions in consequence of the overwhelming numbers that assailed them had not the steamer's crew arrived just then.

Taking good care not to injure the trio, they discharged a volley of pistol shots at the coolies and drove them back.

Several shots were returned by those who were not injured.

The Chinamen knew that they could expect no mercy now, and fought like tigers at bay.

A terrible conflict ensued.

It was short, sharp and decisive.

At its conclusion five of the ship's company laid wounded on the deck, but not one of the coolies was wounded.

They never dreamed of surrendering even then.

But they were soon disarmed, and bound hand and foot.

Many of the crew were injured, but their victory made them forget their wounds and give utterance to a wild cheer.

The captain heartily shook hands with Jack, Tim and Royal. "God bless you!" he cried. "Not only have you saved the ship by your gallant conduct, but our lives as well."

"Those coolies were stubborn brutes," said Jack, evasively. "Once a Chinaman is aroused he has little regard for life."

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"Jack Wright."

"What! Can it be possible?"

"You have heard of me?"

"Often. Everybody knows your name and reputation as an inventor."

"I wouldn't advise you to take these men to China, sir."

"Why not?"

"Instead of getting justice there the coolies would be set free. You'd go to jail and your ship would be libeled. Return to San Francisco if you want justice."

"I believe you and shall do it."

"As I can be of no further service, I'll take my departure."

"Let me thank——"

"Say no more about it, captain," interposed Jack, quickly.

Every man in the crew insisted upon shaking hands with the young inventor to show their appreciation.

Then Jack and his friends departed.

Remounting the ladder, they reached the deck of the Dragon.

"Three cheers for Jack Wright!" cried the captain.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" cheered the crew, vociferously.

As the Dragon sped away, Jack and his companions waved their handkerchiefs to the ship's company.

In half an hour the steamer, heading homeward, was lost to view in the distance.

Jack, the sailor and the boy took off their armor.

They had not received so much as a scratch in the encounter.

"Royal, you're full of grit! I never expected you to show such pluck in the face of danger," said the inventor.

"Oh, I wasn't a-scared of them," replied the boy, who was well pleased at the compliment.

His work had shown Jack that he had a remarkably brave boy with him, although the little fellow did not show it under ordinary circumstances.

It led the young inventor to believe in never judging by appearance.

"If you show as much nerve in the future, when it becomes necessary," said he, "I'll be proud to have you with me."

"Mr. Wright, if I could give up my life to save that of my father I would be willing to do it," earnestly said the little fellow.

And Jack believed him.

He saw that a great affection existed between this boy and his father.

"Do you know where Adam Sloat is going with his ship?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes. He told me he was bound for Tokio."

"Back to Japan, eh?" muttered Jack.

"That's where the Fog Bell always goes."

"Do you know that I'm stuck by an idea?"

"What about?"

"Your father's disappearance."

"And what do you think about it?"

"I have an idea that Sloat caused it."

The boy started and frowned.

He pondered a moment, and then he said:

"He was there with his ship when father reached Yokohama."

"There! Just as I feared. While Sloat was there, isn't it possible that he may have had your father assassinated, and then returned to make away with you?"

"Such a thing could have happened if he was so crazy to get hold of father's money," replied Royal in gloomy tones.

"Did he know anything about the will?"

"Yes—father told him when it was drawn up."

"Depend upon it, then, that Sloat had a hand in your father's mysterious disappearance, Royal."

"It seems to me that if he was depraved enough to try to murder me, he would be bad enough to kill my father," said the boy in tones of conviction.

"That's just the way I figure it out."

"I know a lot about Japan, too," said the boy, "for it was my father's pet theme of conversation, and he imparted about all he knew to me, besides teaching me considerable of the funny language the Japs speak. Now, according to some of his accounts, there were several good chances for assassins to make away with him."

"For example!"

"Well, in the first place, the country swarms with Ionins or bravos, who are merely hired assassins who would do the job for a consideration of a few gold cobangs. Then there is another way. When Europeans or foreigners in Japan wish to make a journey the officials make them take a retinue of yaconins or guards, grooms, interpreters and servants, for which they charge exorbitant prices. They also put restrictions on the voyagers. If for instance, the traveler penetrates any of their sacred temples, climbs their sacred mountains, or otherwise infringes on their rules, he is liable to be killed by the very men he hires to guide him and protect him on his journey."

A serious look crossed Jack's face.

He realized that if Sloat had undertaken to put Charles Maxwell out of the way in Japan, he had the very best facilities at hand for doing so.

It was a question in his mind now whether the explorer was yet in the land of the living to be searched for.

As long as there were certain chances that he might be, and that he had the means of ascertaining, Jack resolved not to dampen the boy's spirits by a gloomy view of the case.

"Well," he said, lightly, "you may have all your fears for nothing. We will do the best we can."

"That's the talk!" enthusiastically replied Royal. "Of course we will, and if father yet lives, we'll find him, too, won't we?"

"To be sure we will," answered Jack, cheerfully.

But in the secret recess of his heart he realized that it was a desperate case, with but little chance for success.

In due course the air motor crossed the Pacific.

So accurately was her course shaped, that she finally sighted land at the very cape on Van Dieman's Strait for which Jack was heading.

The weather had grown insufferably hot in this latitude, and as the Dragon passed Cape Satano, in Osumiken, on the island of Kyusbu, their destination was reached.

But they found themselves in a deplorable position.

A dense, foggy mist which sometimes overhangs the land for a week at a time, now enveloped the Dragon.

There was no help for it but to plunge ahead through the fog toward the mountains, so on they went.

They little dreamed, however, into what fearful peril they were running, as the air motor shot ahead through the dense mist, leaving the Pacific behind her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN IN A CAGE.

"Fritz! Turn on the search light so we can see through this fog."

"I couldn't done it, Shack. She don'd would lighted up alretty."

"What's the matter with the light?"

"Eader the patteries needs gemicals or der garbons vos blayed out."

"I'll examine it and see. How high are we?"

"No more as dirty feets."

"Send her up higher, or we may——"

Crash—bang!"

A fearful shock interrupted him.

It knocked Jack down upon the deck.

Fritz was slammed against the wall.

The Dragon came to a sudden pause, although her wheels were swiftly revolving, and a fearful splitting and crunching sound was heard in the air ahead of her.

It was evident that she had collided with something.

The fog was so dense they could not see what it was.

The bowsprit projected fully fifty feet ahead of the motor, and it was manifest that its sharp point had struck the projection in its way, creating the damage.

For awhile the grinding sound continued, and then the engine pushed ahead, there sounded a fearful crash, and as Jack ran to the rail and peered over he saw what it was.

"We've struck the bamboo tower of a temple and knocked it down!" he shouted to his friends.

The next moment he was obliged to seize the railing to prevent himself falling to the ground.

The ram-like iron bowsprit had pierced the structure like a mighty needle, and when it went down it pulled the air motor with it.

Down she went bow first.

"Stop the helix!" roared Jack.

The Dutchman complied.

Had he been a moment later the bowsprit would have plunged into the ground like a crowbar and remained there holding the Dragon up in the air immovably.

Down went the boat with a terrific crash upon the body of the bamboo temple, smashing it to fragments with a grinding and splitting noise that could be heard for a great distance.

In a moment more the air motor was upon the ground, hopelessly tangled in the ruins of the temple.

Everyone was fearfully shaken up.

A chorus of yells was heard all around them in the voices of the natives, and Jack saw that they were in a settlement.

It was the village of Uchi-no-ura.

Scores of excited Japanese men, women, boys and priests were swarming around, shouting themselves hoarse when they saw the tower come toppling down so unexpectedly with the air motor on top of it.

"All hands inside!" shouted Jack.

He realized that the accident would cost their lives at the hands of the mob if the natives got hold of them, as the destruction of one of their temples is considered one of the most heinous crimes that could be perpetrated.

Everyone got under cover.

They took the precaution to close the windows and fasten the doors, as the Japanese would very likely recover from any timidity they might have had and board the Dragon.

Half an hour passed by.

In that time the natives kept circling around the Dragon, eyeing it curiously and jabbering excitedly all the time.

As Jack feared, they soon recovered from their alarm and kept drawing closer and closer to the air motor, until some of them ventured to touch and board it.

"I'll take the bull by the horns by giving them a dread of it in the beginning," said Jack.

He manipulated the levers awhile, and threw all the electric current into the iron hull.

It shocked some of the natives through their bare feet.

Those who wore straw sandals escaped the current, but seeing their companions spring in the air, yell and run away, they became terrified, and followed them as fast as they could go.

In a few minutes not a man remained on the Dragon.

"That settles them!" laughed Jack.

"Mein Gott! How dot frighden dem!"

"We must find a means of disentangling the bowsprit."

"Dey vas armed mit muskets, und ohf ve go oud, dey shoold us."

"True. We must not remain here, however. I must think out a plan."

There was a trap-door in the floor leading into the hold, and Fritz went down into the opening to examine the battery.

When he came back, he exclaimed:

"I dit fixed me der elecdrics light baddery."

"What was the trouble with it?" asked Jack.

"Just vot I tort. From constant use ohf der light der ghemi-cals vos used ub."

"Did you replenish the jars?"

"Yah. I tink day vork now. Let me dry dot."

He pulled the light lever.

The glare of the search-light shot out.

"It's O. K.," said Jack.

"Vell, you scen a vay oud by der deeficuldies?"

"Yes. We can raise the motor and back her from the wreck."

"Bully for you, Shack. Dry id."

The young inventor started the helix.

All the strength of the battery was put on and the machine was raised a few feet from the ground.

Everything was clear in back of her, and when the screw levers were reversed she backed away from the fallen tower.

It required considerable straining to free her entirely from the wreckage, but they finally managed it.

Then she stopped.

More power was added to the helix when the screws paused.

To the astonishment of the Japs she began to rise.

One of their bonzes, or priests, caught hold of her.

He clung to one of the side screw arms, and to the horror of himself as well as his companions, was carried up in the air.

Rendered desperate, he worked his way in to the deck.

Here he stood howling like a madman.

His yells attracted Jack's attention and he ran out.

As soon as the priest saw him, he drew a sword from his girdle, and uttering a frantic shout, he rushed for the inventor.

Jack was unarmed.

He had no time to retreat.

Before he could get into the wheel-house, the priest would reach him and hew him with the sword.

Realizing his danger, Jack fastened a keen glance upon the old wretch; as he raised the sword to deliver a cut, the young inventor sprang back.

Down came the blade within an inch of his head with a sibilant swish, and ere the bonze could recover the use of it, Jack darted at him and dealt him a terrific blow.

His fist caught the infidel on the nose.

It knocked him flat on his back, and he dropped the sword.

Jack eagerly grasped the weapon.

The priest scrambled to his feet.

Seeing his sword in Jack's hands, a feeling of despair took possession of him, and he uttered an invocation to Buddha.

Then he rushed to the side of the motor and leaped off.

Down to the ground fifty feet below he went like a meteor.

"Fool!" muttered Jack.

He knew that the man's death was certain.

The motor continued to ascend.

Up, up, she rose to the height of a mile.

The fog was left below, hiding the earth from view.

"Send her ahead, Fritz," cried Jack.

"Vot becoom ohf der Shapanese?"

"Jumped overboard after trying to cleave me with this sword. I'll keep the weapon as a souvenir."

The Dragon crossed Osumi bay, and shot toward Komatsu in Hyuga, passed over it, and, leaving the fog banks behind, Jack soon saw the lights in the big city of Miyako-no-jo.

It laid in a plain south of the Akaye river.

After descending for a closer view, the Dragon left the last tea houses on the suburbs of the city behind.

Across the country she swept till daylight.

Fields of grain and rice bordered the road, while men and women up to their knees in liquid mud were busy planting the latter.

Sweet potatoes grew on terraces, supported by walls built along the faces of hills, the hedges were overrun with honeysuckles and azaleas, while pines, palms, bamboos and cryptomeria grew side by side.

Wild-looking passes were seen, where hill and rock were tumbled in chaotic confusion from their volcanic beds.

Frequent glimpses of the seacoast and bays were caught.

Late in the afternoon, while crossing the Oita Ken of Bungo, and proceeding toward the city, Jack observed a long cortege of men going along the road.

Two of them held a pole on their shoulders, from the middle of which hung a bamboo cage in which a man was confined.

Leveling a spyglass at this curious arrangement, he was startled to observe that the inmate of the cage was a young man clad in European clothing.

He was being carried after the manner of prisoners being taken to the place of execution.

It startled Jack to see a white man thus placed at the mercy of the olive-hued natives, and he at once made up his mind to rescue the prisoner.

Calling the attention of Tim to the fact, he shouted:

"Send the Dragon down, old fellow, and we will see what the meaning of his captivity is."

"Ay, ay!" cried Tim.

He slackened the speed of the helix, and the air motor began to swiftly descend toward the road.

CHAPTER IX.

WITHIN THE PALACE WALLS.

None of the Japanese observed the descending air motor as she came down behind them, and they did not look back.

Their costume was the kirimon, a sort of open dressing gown.

It was crossed in front, and held in place by a girdle made of a silk scarf, fastened upon the back.

Some of them wore silk jackets and trousers, richly embroidered, cotton socks, straw sandals fastened by a strap passing inside the great toe, and upon their heads were laquered bamboo conical hats.

This showed them to be high-class people, for the peasants, fishers, bettos (grooms), porters and laborers go naked except for a narrow girdle around the loins.

There was a slant to their eyes, and the hair was all shaved off except a tuft on top, which was glued together like a shoe-brush.

The leader of the party was the daimio, or native prince of Oita.

Each province in Japan has a daimio to rule it, these princes forming the Mikado's council.

They live like feudal barons of old and sway a tyrannical reign over the people inhabiting the Kens they govern.

He was being carried in a norimon, or palanquin, guarded by four jaconins on sturdy little ponies, at the heads of which ran the grooms.

The air motor descended like a bird.

As it hovered over the cortege, Jack lowered a grapnel.

It swung along until it caught the bamboo cage.

"Up!" shouted the inventor.

Whirr! went the helix.

Up shot the motor swiftly.

She lifted the cage and pole up in the air.

The astonished natives paused, stared up at it in utter stupefaction, and the machine mounted higher.

Up, up she went like a rocket.

A roar of laughter pealed from Jack's mouth when he saw how much he had astonished them.

Tim and Royal were laughing till the tears ran down their cheeks, and now assisted Jack to haul the cage up.

"Fritz, stop her! We are out of range of their rifles."

The Dutchman slackened the speed of the helix.

By this time the cage reached the deck, and they had a better view of the prisoner inside than they had before.

He was, if possible, more surprised than the Japs.

Glaring wildly at the aeronauts, he suddenly gasped in English:

"By heavens, this must be a dream."

"No, it isn't," said Jack. "We've saved you."

"But I can't understand it."

"I'll explain. We're a party of American aeronauts."

"But this isn't a balloon——"

"It's a substitute for one."

"I see."

"Who are you?"

"Roger Hawley."

"American?"

"No, English."

"How did you get in that scrape?"

"I am employed at the British legation at Tokio. Our minister had a difficulty with the daimio of Oita. We came down in a junk together to adjust the matter. Instead of arbitrating, the daimio seized us and condemned us to death. We were to have our heads cut off. The minister is now in Oita on the sea coast. I escaped. That party tracked me and caught me. They were taking me back for execution."

"Let me get you out of this cage."

Jack broke it open and pulled the man out.

He was bound hand and foot, but Jack liberated him.

Standing up he stretched himself, as he had been cramped in an awkward position for some time.

Peering down at the people from whom he had been so unexpectedly rescued, he burst into a gleeful laugh.

"Treacherous scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "You reverence dogs, but have no regard for human life!"

"Is the British Consul at Oita now?" asked Jack.

"Yes; but they will murder him when they get back."

"Suppose we try to rescue him."

"What! Could you do it?"

"Probably, with your assistance."

"What would you want me to do?"

"Guide us to his place of confinement."

"That is very easily done. He's in the daimio's palace yonder."

He pointed off at the city.

Jack took a keen survey of the place.

The air motor rushed toward it, and soon hovered near the city.

A previous day of rain converted the streets into pools of mud.

There were numerous tea houses, noisy groups of people,

who besieged the stores for articles made of straw rushes and bamboo.

A confused symphony of flageolets, trumpets, Pan's pipes and samsins, a rude stringed instrument, resembling a guitar.

An infinite variety of toys, hats and animals were displayed at the store fronts in the form of the bear of Yess, the monkey of Nippon, the domesticated buffalo, and centenary turtles.

To the right extended a grove of cypress above which flocks of ravens were wheeling.

A clearing in its midst was the place of execution.

Nothing could equal the gloomy aspect of the place.

There were scores of heads and decapitated bodies lying on the ground abandoned to the skulking dogs and croaking birds.

A pillar of granite bearing an unknown dismal inscription rose at one side near several mounds of earth marking the graves of some of the victims.

There was a plank shed which served as a shelter for the officers who were present at the execution, and a gigantic statue of Buddha—the heathen god of the Japanese.

No unwalled city presented a more inhospitable appearance than that upon which Jack looked down.

It resembled a huge park, the entrance to which is prohibited.

The richly wooded hills were dotted with bamboo huts and old temples with great columns and enormous roofs.

Everywhere were walls, boarded structures, palisades and long streets. The entrance to the city was concealed behind large piles, and thousands of people thronged about.

But few junks were in the sea.

"There stands the palace," said Roger Hawley.

He pointed at the building in the middle of the city.

It was surrounded by guard houses, and they in turn were encircled by a moat.

It was a wretched bamboo building scarcely deserving the name of palace, but it was the way the Japanese nobles lived.

"Do you know in what part of the palace the minister is confined?" asked Jack, presently.

"Yes. It is one of the guard houses."

"How can we best reach it?"

"By crossing the moat and descending into the courtyard."

"See—back there! The daimio and his guards are hastening toward the city!" said Jack.

Hawley saw them coming.

It seemed to make him very nervous.

"Unless we hasten our movements," said he, "they will reach Oita in time to frustrate our attempt."

"Hey, Fritz!"

"Hallo! Who's der medder?"

"Send the Dragon down into the palace courtyard."

While the Dutchman was carrying out this order Jack hastily made his preparations.

Every one was armed and armored.

Many of the inhabitants of the city now caught sight of the flying machine, and being in utter ignorance of what it was, they were overwhelmed with violent superstitious dread. Most of them fled into their houses.

As the Dragon descended low enough, Jack soon caught a view of the interior of these dwellings, as all were wide open.

"Shitanirio!" (kneel down) was the universal cry, when like magic everyone fell upon their knees, bowing their heads to the ground as the Dragon passed.

The machine crossed the moat.

It was surrounded by a wall built of mud, intersected with layers of tiles and plastered over on the outside.

There were parapets, and loop-holes for musketry, a large gateway with massive, overhanging roof, and a straggling group of ignoble-looking houses inside, only one story high.

A three-storied pagoda rose about the level of the other roofs.

in the inclosure, standing in the midst of a picturesque clump of timber.

The pagoda was the daimio's residence, and was made of bamboo.

Over the mud wall flew the Dragon.

In a moment more she landed in the court.

Jack cast a quick glance around.

The place was swarming with toddling women carrying fans and dressed like the men, save that their hair was dressed high, and stuck full of fancy pins.

Among them were numerous nude children and the household guards, all of whom fled in superstitious horror from the Dragon.

"Where is the consul confined?" asked Jack.

"In that guard-house," replied Hawley.

He pointed to a dingy building, with doors and windows closed.

The young inventor rushed toward it.

He could not open the door, but heard voices inside.

Firing a grenade against it, the door was splintered to pieces.

In rushed Jack.

The next moment he was surrounded by a score of the guards, who grappled him and flung him down on the floor.

Hawley, Tim and Royal rushed in.

They, too, were attacked.

A fearful struggle ensued.

In a moment a scene of dire confusion was raging.

Pistol shots and screams were heard upon all sides, and in the gloom they fought like demons.

CHAPTER X.

UNEXPECTED INFORMATION.

Every blow the guards dealt the four rescuers and every shot that struck their metal suits fell harmless.

On the other hand, the explosive bullets fired from the pneumatic pistols created the direst destruction.

Unable to withstand the destructive fire any longer, he guards fled into the vast courtyard.

Here Fritz opened fire upon them with a rifle from within the pilot-house, sending them flying in all directions.

Seeing they were routed, Jack dashed aside a number of paper screens, and observed a figure in the back of the room.

It was a man fastened in a barrel.

Only his head protruded from the top.

He was undergoing the most excruciating torture by the steady dripping of water from a tube of bamboo, down upon his head.

This was only one of the many forms of torture and secret murder practiced by the daimios upon their enemies.

"Help! For God's sake, help!" hoarsely moaned the man in English.

"Here he is now!" cried Jack.

He attacked the barrel, broke the hoops and liberated the consul.

The poor fellow was very weak.

"Help him to the motor!" cried Jack.

"Thank heaven!" gasped the minister, "there's Hawley."

"Come this way, sir," eagerly cried the clerk.

He grasped the consul and dragged him out.

A warning cry from Tim reached the inventor's ears.

"Here comes a crowd."

"Fly for your lives!" screamed Jack.

Away went the boy and the sailor, and the inventor attempted to follow them when he tripped over a straw mat.

Down he fell with a thud.

The shock knocked the breath out of him.

He laid gasping upon the floor for some time, and the others, thinking he was with them, boarded the Dragon, and yelling to Fritz, the Dutchman started the air motor.

Up flew the Dragon, her drag rope with the grapnel hanging down.

Jack recovered himself and arose.

By the time he got out of the guard house the machine was twenty feet in the air.

From every direction scores of the natives who had been let in from the streets, were rushing toward the inventor.

He saw that they would annihilate him if he fell in their clutches.

The moment they saw him they began to discharge their firearms at him, and a hail of bullets struck the suit he wore.

For an instant Jack was staggered by the shock.

Quickly recovering himself, he rushed across the yard toward them.

A howl escaped the mob, as they thought he was charging on them, but such was not Jack's intention.

He had seen the drag rope grapnel rising from the ground. It was eight feet from the earth when he sprang for it.

His fingers closed on the grapnel.

He clung to it like grim death.

Up in the air he was carried, dangling from the end of it, and every weapon was aimed at him and fired by the Japanese.

Jack's body swayed like a pendulum when the whistling pellets struck his body, and he swung himself up until he got his legs astride of the flukes of the grapnel.

Up, and still further up mounted the Dragon.

Shot after shot was fired at her, but her iron-clad hull turned the bullets harmlessly aside.

Just then Royal missed Jack.

Glancing over the side, he caught sight of the inventor on the grapnel, and shouted to the others.

The ascent of the Dragon was stopped.

She was then half a mile in the air.

Fritz and Tim hoisted up the drag rope, and Jack reached the air motor's deck none the worse for his adventure.

"Good Lordy Lord!" gasped Tim. "I reckoned as yer wuz aboard."

"No, I stumbled and fell, and you went up without me. But I got a grip on the grapnel, and thus managed to save my skin."

They glanced down at the city.

The whole place was in an uproar.

As the daimio and his cortege had reached the city and heard the news of the rescue, they were furious, for they realized that the English minister would lay the matter before the mikado, and thus make trouble for them.

"Send her on, boys!" cried Jack. "There's no good of staying here."

Tim assumed charge of the wheel, and the Dragon resumed her flight, while all hands took off their armor.

When Jack returned to the cabin, he found the English minister so much recovered that he was holding an animated conversation with his clerk, who was telling him about Jack.

A smile lit up his pallid face when the young inventor entered, and he heartily shook hands with him, and said:

"I shall never forget this, Mr. Wright. I certainly would have perished had you not come at such an opportune moment."

"How do you feel now?"

"On the high road to recovery."

"You wish to go back to Tokio?"

"I would not ask you to take me there."

"How else could you reach the capital?"

"By train from any city on the other side of the Suo sea."

"I will land you near Fu Rugawa."

"That will do capitally. This is a wonderful invention."

"I like her performance very well."

"May I ask if you have any special purpose in view for coming here?"

"Yes. I am in search of a lost explorer."

"Indeed. What was his name?"

"Charles Maxwell."

"Good heavens! I could give you some information about that man."

It was Jack's turn to look surprised now.

He was very much startled by the minister's declaration, and as soon as he recovered his equanimity, he said:

"Then you are just the man for me. I have his son aboard."

"The boy I saw?"

"Yes; and here he is now."

"Do you want me, Mr. Wright?" asked the boy, as he entered.

"Yes. This gentleman can give us some information about your father."

"Oh, gee! Is that so?" delightedly asked the little fellow.

"Well," said the consul, "I may not give you as much information as you desire, but I think I can put you on the track of the gentleman you mention."

"Do so by all means," said Jack, earnestly.

"About a year or more ago I met him in Tokio. He had just come from Yokohama, eighteen miles distant, aboard of his half brother's ship, the Fog Bell.

"Ah! then he was in company with Adam Sloat."

"Yes—that was the captain's name. They were together a good deal when ashore, and began to organize an expedition to explore the interior up into Iwashiro, by going through the Middle States. I was very much interested in the work, as I am a member of the Royal Geographical Society of London, and begged Mr. Maxwell to send me word as to what success he met with. The Fog Bell sailed for the United States the day after he departed. Several months passed by, and one day I was surprised by the receipt of a letter by a coolie who had been in Mr. Maxwell's employ. In it he wrote me that when the expedition reached Gumma Ken in Kozuke, his retainers, without the slightest provocation, fell upon him one night while encamped in the mountains and endeavored to murder him."

"Sloat's work, as I feared," muttered Jack.

"The explorer fought desperately, and, covered with wounds, he managed to reach the best pony, mounted it, and rode for his life pursued by the whole band of assassins. He outstripped them finally, and made his escape. Remaining at the village of Kaneko until he had entirely recovered, he made his way northward with his men, and finally reached Lake Inawa Shiro, where he discovered a gold mine, of which he was in quest. Here he engaged a large number of coolies, and mining the lead, he amassed a large amount of the gold. This he removed to a place along the seashore by pack horses, and concealed. He then returned to the lake, paid off his men, discharged them, and retaining his two coolies to start further northward to continue his explorations, he sent me that letter. Although he promised to write me again, I have never since heard from him."

Here was a revelation.

It caused our friends no end of surprise.

There yet was a chance that Charles Maxwell might be alive. Speculating over the matter for some time, they finally partook of a repast which Fritz sat before them, and ultimately turned in.

The Dragon crossed the sea of Suo that night, and in the morning alighted a short distance from Fu Rugawa, where the Englishmen alighted and took their departure.

The hills and mulberry trees surrounding the place where the Dragon lay were alive with monkeys, which the Japanese eat, goi-sagi birds, and oshi-dori, or mandarin ducks.

Before returning to his flight through the air, Jack resolved to bring down some of the latter to replenish the larder.

Telling his companions his intentions and providing himself with some weapons, he plunged into the shrubbery near the rocky sea shore and strode away.

At that time there was a very stringent law prohibiting the shooting of crane, goose, or swan, of which Jack knew nothing.

When he had reached a point half a mile from the Dragon he observed a crane standing in a marsh along the bank of a stream spanned by a rustic bamboo bridge.

This bridge connected the high road.

Jack fired at the bird and brought it down.

Just as he did so a carriage, looking like a gig, called a jin-riki-sha, drawn by two coolies, and occupied by a hattamoto (small noble), came along.

This dignitary observed Jack's unlawful act with a dark scowl, and yelling at his carriage pullers to stop at the bridge, he alighted.

CHAPTER XI.

ATTACKED BY WOLVES.

"Say! Yo' sell dem gun?"

The speaker was one of the coolies, acting under the nobleman's orders.

He had learned to speak English in the United States.

Jack looked at him in surprise.

"Hello! Here's a heathen who speaks English!" muttered Jack.

"Well, what yo' say?" interrogated the coolie.

"No, I don't want to sell my weapons," laughed Jack.

The coolies translated what the inventor said to the hattamoto.

He looked very much displeased for a moment, and then addressed a few words to his human horse.

Upon which the coolies remarked, pointing at his master:

"Him heap big man, an' not like dat."

"Evidently, if his seven-foot scowl is a criterion to go by."

"Yo' not know de custom of dis country when yo' meet a hattamoto?"

"Can't say I do, unless it is to bow to the ground, and hang me if my rich Yankee blood will permit me to do that," replied Jack.

"But yo' be fr'ends?"

"Of course. I don't want any enemies."

"Drink saki with him den."

Now Jack had heard that saki was a liquor distilled from rice, which often gave the Japanese the jim-jams.

In fact it is the national beverage.

He was not averse to tasting it as a proof of his good-will toward the bald-headed dignitary in the two-wheeled carriage, so he said:

"Well, I can't promise to get loaded to suit his royal nibs, but if he insists upon it, I'll take a snifter with him."

"Dat good!" said the coolies, showing his yellow teeth in a grin, as he took the small china bottle from the dignitary's hand. "We always be fr'ends after dat."

Jack uncorked the bottle and took a pull.

He felt as if he were struck by lightning at the first swallow, and letting the bottle fall, he drew a disgusted face, staggered back, glared at the natives and fell over on the ground.

He found it impossible to get up again.

"Say!" he gasped. "What was in that liquor, that——"

But he could say no more.

A sudden dizziness seized him.

His head seemed to go around and around.

Then suddenly he lost his senses entirely.

The saki was drugged.

As soon as the rascals saw that he was completely at their mercy, they rushed up to him with some pieces of cord.

Driving four short stakes in the ground in the form of a square, they laid him on his back between them, and bound his ankles to two and his wrists to the other two.

Rushing back to the carriage, at a word of command from their noble, they ran away with the vehicle toward the city to make a complaint against Jack for shooting the crane.

He would thus be helpless when the police came to beat him with their bamboo rods for breaking the law.

Jack had not lain there long before there sounded a wild howling of wolves in the woods.

The gaunt, hungry beasts had scented him from the distance, and came swarming from all directions toward the spot where he was fastened.

In a short time the effects of the drug wore away.

Jack returned to consciousness.

He soon recalled to mind what had happened, and then became aware of the fact that he was in danger of his life from the wolves.

The beasts were gathering in large numbers and squatting in a huge circle around him. They kept up their howling and yelping and attracted others to the spot.

None of them had the courage to attack Jack at once when they saw he was alive.

A thrill of horror passed over the young inventor, for he found that he could not move hand or foot in consequence of his bonds.

"Great heaven! I will have to remain a passive victim while those beasts devour me alive," he groaned.

It was a terrible situation in which to find himself, for he could expect no assistance from his friends, as they were half a mile away, and were not apt to know what was transpiring.

Indeed, it was doubtful if they could hear the cries of the wolves, and if they did, never would suspect the situation he was in, and therefore would not investigate the howls.

A cold sweat burst out all over him.

He glanced at the sky.

It was thus manifested to him that he had lain there long, else the position of the sun would have been more changed than it then was.

Had he been unconscious for any considerable period his protracted absence might have excited the alarm of his companions and brought them on his trail.

Jack glanced at the wolves.

They were lean, ugly-looking brutes.

It was clear enough that once they gained courage to attack him they would kill him at once.

A feeling of anxious alarm overwhelmed Jack.

He began to yell for help.

Someone might hear him, he argued.

But though his voice startled the wolves, and rang out sharp and clear through the woodland, it brought no response save its own echo.

Still he kept on shouting.

He noticed that at the first sound of his voice the howls of the wolves ceased, and they beat a rapid retreat.

This state of timidity would not last long, however, for as soon as they became accustomed to it and found that no harm came to them, they would return more emboldened than they were before.

The monkeys took up his cries and created a fearful din in the trees, and the wolves began to return.

Their numbers were increased ten-fold.

Now they drew nearer to their intended victim.

Long and red their tongues lolled from their gaping mouths, and they rushed in closer to him and sped away again.

Each time they approached nearer.

In a few minutes they reached him.

No longer his cries availed to drive them away.

All seemed to realize that he could not hurt them.

He could hear the snapping of their teeth, and feel their gaunt bodies and legs brushing against his prostrate form, and with a despairing feeling he closed his eyes.

"That settles it. I'm a gone case!" he muttered.

One of the ravenous beasts leaped over him.

They were crowding so close now that he felt sure there was no earthly escape from them.

A sharp pair of teeth snapped at him.

He could feel a twinge of pain as the gleaming teeth sunk in his thigh, and a groan of despair escaped him.

Death in all its grim possibilities seemed certain.

The movement among the wolves grew fast and furious.

The one that had hold of him released its desperate grip.

Jack opened his eyes.

Amazed, he saw the monsters retreating.

They were running at full speed.

A gun shot crashed among them increasing their velocity.

Jack could not see who discharged it.

But he heard the hurried patter of footsteps approaching.

In a moment more a human form bent over him.

"Royal!"

"Oh, Mr. Wright."

"You arrived just in time."

"I will release you."

His sharp knife gashed over the bonds, and in a moment more Jack was upon his feet and seized his weapons.

They fired shot after shot among the wolves.

A score of them fell.

"Who tied you?" the boy asked.

"Two coolies did it."

"What for?"

"Rank cussedness, I presume."

"Didn't you do anything to them?"

"No. I had just shot a crane, and——"

"Why, that's against the law here."

"Is that so?"

"Those birds are considered sacred."

"Jingo. Now I see through it."

"Very likely they'll have you arrested. I'm glad I followed you."

"And here they come now with some Jap policemen."

Jack pointed up the road.

Both coolies were running toward them with some officers.

They had seen that Jack recovered from the drug and was free.

"Come for the Dragon!" cried Royal.

"Go ahead. If they beat us running we are lost."

Away they rushed through the woods at breakneck speed, hotly pursued by the furious natives.

The Japanese were swift runners.

Indeed, most of them are trained from boyhood to be all-around athletes, as a part of their education.

But Jack and the boy were desperate.

They had their liberty at stake, and ran like deers.

Through the woods and glens they rushed at the top of their speed, anxious to avoid the use of their firearms if possible, but the Japanese began to shoot after them as soon as they found themselves being distanced.

In a few moments the bullets were flying around the two fugitives furiously.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS BOATMAN.

"Get behind this fallen tree trunk, Royal!" panted Jack.

"Are you going to fire back at those fellows?" asked the boy, complying.

"Yes, we can't expose ourselves as targets for them."

"Here they come!"

Bang! bang! bang! bang! went four shots.

Several of the policeman were wounded, and the rest halted.

Once more Jack and the boy fled.

They met Tim and Fritz, alarmed by the shots, running toward them, and a few hurried words explained the situation.

Losing no time, they all ran on to the Dragon and got aboard.

Jack sprang into the wheel-house, and starting the helix, the motor shot up into the air before their pursuers reached her.

A shout of mingled alarm, rage and astonishment escaped their pursuers when they caught sight of the ascending Dragon.

So amazed were the Japanese that they never dreamed of shooting at her, and the machine quickly gained a great height.

Here she was safe.

"They couldn't hit us now if they tried!" exclaimed Jack, as he stopped the ascent of the motor, and drove her along.

"Oh, vhy vosn't I in der fighd from der start?" regretfully sighed Fritz.

"Say, Jack, will I heave 'em a shot from aloft?" asked Tim.

"It is useless. Spare them. They are too much at our mercy now."

"Always generous!" muttered Royal. "They would not have had any mercy on you for killing the sacred crane."

"I hate sich ungrateful lubbers!" growled Tim.

"They're the worst I ever saw," the boy commented.

"That shows as yer ain't had as much experience as me."

"Why, Tim?"

"'Cause I've met wuss nor them."

"You have? When?"

"When I wuz in ther navy——"

"Shestnuts!" interposed Fritz, in disgust.

"You dry up!" roared the sailor.

"Tell me what you refer to, Tim," said Royal.

"Sartinly, my lad. Yer see, it wuz this way. We wuz carryin' 5,000 land troops from New York ter Charleston durin' ther war, an' a big gale came up wot blowed us miles out of our course, an' heaved us on one o' the Fiji islan's——"

"Did the storm carry you around Cape Horn, Tim?"

"O' course it did. Waal sir, thar we wuz—wrecked on a cannibal islan', an' all ther blasted natives begun ter build roarin' big fires ter make a sailor-fricasse of us when up came a tidal wave, washed over ther island, an' swept 'em all inter ther ocean. They wuz all powerful swimmers an' it struck me as we could make good use o' them ter pull the frigate afloat——"

"Didn't the tidal wave wash the frigate adrift again?"

"Lor' bless yer, no. Yer see, her keel wuz stuck so tight in the sand, it couldn't. Waal, as I wuz a-sayin', I didn't mention my idee to nobody. But I got a long rope, and fastenin' one end ter ther ship, I took ther other end an' sprung overboard with it. Then I swum fer them niggers, and tied ther rope ter each one of them. In a few minutes I had a million of 'em harnessed——"

"A million."

"I mean a thousan'——"

"Isn't that a good many?"

"A hundred, I should a-said."

"Well—what next, Tim?"

"Don't yer interrup' me again, my lad, or I won't tell yer."

"No, no, no. Go on, Tim—you have got me awful curious."

"Whar wuz I? Oh, yes—I had them ere cannibals tied ter ther rope—that is, I had ther rope tied to ther cannibals. Ther I ups wi' my whip, an' I lambasted 'em. They swam out ter sea, ther rope wuz pulled taut, an' they begun ter pull. An' blast me if they didn't haul ther ship afloat. Of course they wuz all black an' blue whar I pounded 'em, an' dretful mad at me fer lickin' 'em, but then I had ter do it, fer ter save the ship——"

"But you said she was wrecked, Tim," ventured the boy.

"Didn't I tell yer ter stow yer jawin'-tackle?" fiercely roared the old sailor. "How am I goin' ter spin this ere yarn if you're ferever askin' silly questions? 'Tain't none o' your business if ther ship wuz wrecked, stranded, or set afire! No it aint. D'yer hear that?"

"Well, what was the end of the affair, Tim?"

"Why, as soon as I unriggered them lubbers from ther rope, instid o' feelin' grateful ter me fer lettin' 'em save us, wot should they do but they all tackled me. One o' them bit me on ther foot, another one chewed my starboard ear off, another tore a hole through my timber leg, an' ther rest fastened on ter me like a lot of leeches."

"Your ear is on yet, Tim."

"I'll venture ter say you don't know as it's a dead man's ear. Yer see I had a operation when I got back aboard. One o' my messmates died, and the ship's surgeon sawed his ear off an' stuck it on my head with glue. It growed whar ther old ear wuz rigged."

"Oh, I sec."

"Ter continue: Seein' as I wuz ter be made inter chewin' gun, I just hauled off an' swatted them niggers right an' lef'. Still some o' them had thar teeth stuck in my skin, an' when I seed they couldn't git 'em out, I made up my mind ter drownd 'em. So I sunk down, draggin' 'em with me, an' remained under water till they kicked ther bucket."

"And you didn't drown yourself?"

"How could I be here to spin this yarn, if I did?" indignantly asked Tim.

"That's so," dubiously replied the boy.

"I swum under water an' shakin' off ther corpses o' them ere meneaters, I reached ther frigate an' got aboard. My messmates wuz so grateful fer wot I done ter save 'em that they chipped in wi' plugs o' terbaccy, an' subscribed enough ter last me fer forty years."

"That was an adventure, Tim!" exclaimed Royal, emphatically.

"But wait till I tell yer ther rest."

At this point, however, Fritz chimed in.

Not with his mouth, but with his old accordeon.

A heart harrowing funeral dirge began to wheeze and groan from the instrument in the cabin, and Tim came to a pause.

With a baleful look glaring from his useful eye, he crept toward the door of the central turret and hissed malevolently:

"Thar's ther fat lubber an' his instrument. I never hated pizen like I do that ere machine. If yer any kind of a doctor git yer machine ready. Ther's a goin' ter be a sick Dutchman aboard o' this craft, an' I'm ther roarin' old tornado wot's goin' ter give him ther spasm."

He disappeared inside the turret.

A moment later the music stopped.

There sounded a scuffle, a terrible bang, and the door flew open.

Instead of the Dutchman's gory corpse, Tim came flying out head first, landed on his head and rolled over on the deck.

"Dash my toplights!" he groaned.

A roar of laughter escaped Royal, and the sailor picked himself up.

"Hurrah for Sherman!" roared Fritz in the turret.

The ancient mariner rubbed himself.

"You wait'll I git a-hold o' you!" he bellowed.

"Did you kill him, Tim?" asked Royal with a grin.

"Pretty near," replied the old sailor, with dignity. "If I hadn't relented at ther last minute he'd a-been a dead man. Yer see, I hated ter hit a feller wot's shorter than myself, so I didn't touch him."

"It looked as if he didn't give you the chance."

"Wot!" shrieked Tim, indignantly. "D'yer mean ter say as I couldn't lick thar fat Dutch——"

"Where iss he?" roared Fritz, coming out just then.

Tim made a dive for the pilot-house, and casting a scared look over his shoulder, plunged in and locked the door.

A serene smile crossed the Dutchman's face.

"I soaked him der minutes he coom in," announced he. "Den——"

"Rats!" yelled a voice behind him.

Fritz jumped a foot in the air.

Putting up his fists and recoiling, he yelled:

"Coom on! I vos retty for yer!"

"It's only the parrot," laughed Royal.

A look of relief crossed the fat fellow's face.

"Ach, I knowed id all de dime," said he, assuming a very wise look. "Don'd yer s'bose I know Bismarck's voice from Dim's?"

Royal didn't believe him, but he said nothing to the contrary, and the Dutchman chased his pet into the turret.

The air motor had descended near the ground again, and was then gliding across the country toward Kuga.

From there she sped out upon the Seto Uchi, or Inland Sea, one of the most famous bodies of water about Japan.

It laid between the island of Shikoku and Nippon proper, and was filled with hundreds of little islands.

Crossing Bingo sea, the total distance of about two hundred miles, including the seas of Harima and Izumi were passed over, and the following morning found the Dragon speeding across the mainland from Osaka toward Biwa lake.

The scenery around this lake was particularly beautiful.

According to a popular tradition, in the year 286 B. C. a terrible earthquake opened the earth, forming the lake; at the same time the sacred mountain of Fujisan was upheaved in a single night from the bottom of the sea.

When the air motor reached the lake it was late in the night.

Jack sent the Dragon down to within a few yards of the surface of the dark water, and directing her across it he presently saw in the distance a number of boats heading for the northern shore.

They were filled with men.

These boats seemed to come from all quarters of the lake, and were apparently heading for a certain objective point.

It aroused the young inventor's curiosity.

He saw that something unusual was going on.

He resolved to follow the boats and ascertain what it was.

No lights were shown on the Dragon.

By keeping her close to the water he easily concealed her movements from the view of the boatmen, as it was rather dark, and none of them had seen her yet.

Tim and Fritz were apprised of Jack's intention.

Slackening the speed of the machine in order to keep her astern of the boats, Jack let her slowly drift until the shore was reached by the boatmen, and all had debarked.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIKADO OF JAPAN.

"Where dose paldhetet, yaller nickers vos gone, Shack?"

"They are all stringing through the woods toward yonder ruin."

"Don't you could get dot Tragons near dem mitoud being seen?"

"I might by going around those rocks."

"Whar's ther boy?" asked Tim. "He kin understan' thar lin-go some, an' might tell us wot they're a-sayin'."

"Call him from the middle turret."

Tim used the telephone.

In a few moments Royal came in.

They told him what they wished.

Jack then made a detour of the trees with the Dragon.

She was sent among the rocks, and finally came out behind the ruin in back of a dilapidated temple.

It was a strange, weird scene that lay stretched before the crew of the airship, for the moon occasionally broke out from behind the heavy clouds and shot its silvery light down.

It was the ruins of a temple of Hatchman.

The locality was surrounded by rows of grand cypress trees.

The place was built in terraces.

Around the first courtyard were the ruined houses of the priests, thrust behind each other like side scenes of a theater.

Two great oval ponds occupied the middle of the square, connected by a broad canal, that was spanned by a bamboo bridge which was covered with lacquer and old copper ornaments.

One pond was filled with magnificent blossoms of the white lotus, the other with red lotus, while gold and pearly fish swam in the crystal water, and black tortoise basked on the flower leaves.

On the second elevation was a building with a high peaked roof sheltering two monstrous idols, sculptured of wood, and coated with vermillion lacquer from head to foot.

Their fat bodies were spotted with innumerable balls of chewed paper which the native visitors threw at them in passing.

Prayers were written on the papers.

Thousands of sandals of straw littered the idols as offerings from pilgrims.

A cyclopean wall surrounded the second court, carved and painted red and brilliant green.

The idols were those of Daiboodhs, or the Great Buddha, held in the right-hand scepters, in the left a lotus, and wore triple tiaras, composed of the heads of gilded, inferior deities.

A semi-circular staircase led to their pedestals.

Seated upon these stairs were several daimios, while squatted cross-legged on the ground in a half-circle in front of them were nearly a hundred men styled hans (clans) and karos (councillors).

When the airship came to a pause, there was a great waving of their fans, and the daimios began to address them.

Royal listened intently to the harangue.

In a short time he turned to Jack and said:

"These chiefs are conspiring to murder the mikado."

"Did you hear them say so?"

"Yes, sir; but I suffer great disadvantage here."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I can't hear all they say."

"Too far away from them?"

"Yes," replied Royal.

"I'll send the Dragon to the ground and you can debark."

"Splendid! Then I can get nearer to them."

The air motor landed.

Royal then left her.

Creeping through the shrubbery, he approached the temple as stealthily as a cat, and reached a fallen column.

From here he could easily have overheard every word the Japanese conspirators uttered.

But no sooner had he ensconced himself in a favorable position when there sounded a rustling in the bushes, and a man sprang upon him and caught him by the neck.

He was pinioned down to the ground by the guard, who thereupon raised a wild cry of alarm.

Jack saw the misfortune that befell the boy.

The whole assemblage quickly arose and rushed toward the guard and the boy uttering savage threats against him.

A tremendous whirring of the wheels on the airship suddenly startled them, and they came to a pause, their swords and daggers clutched in their hands.

Along came the Dragon toward them.

No sooner was she started when Jack turned on the searchlight and it flashed blindingly into their faces.

The Japanese conspirators were terrified.

They gave utterance to a chorus of discordant yells, and scattered.

Up to the boy flew the machine.

The guard was a savage wretch.

He raised aloft a gleaming dagger to stab his victim.

Before this furious intention could be carried out Jack fired a pistol shot at him, and he fell over mortally wounded.

Up jumped Royal, and as the Dragon glided up to him, he swiftly clambered aboard of her.

"Go for the daimios!" he cried.

He pointed at the three men, and Jack steered the motor after them as they fled in a bunch down the terrace.

Bang! went the prow of the Dragon among them, and they were all knocked flying down the slope.

"Capture them!" shouted Jack.

Fritz and Tim were ready with steel handcuffs.

As the Dragon paused they alighted, and rushing up to two of the daimios, handcuffed them together.

Both were in an ugly mood over their capture.

They showed an inclination to fight, and the sailor and Dutchman were forced to drag them aboard the air motor.

The other chief scrambled to his feet, took to his heels and vanished behind the stone wall with the rest.

"Ve vos got two ohf dem!" shouted Fritz, excitedly.

"Lock them up in the store-room!" cried Jack.

This was done.

"Wot are yer goin' ter do wi' them?" asked Tim, when he returned.

"Hand them over to the Mikado," replied Jack, as he sent the Dragon flying up into the air. "They deserve punishment for high treason."

"The crowd is heading for the lake!" shouted Royal just then.

"Let them go."

The air motor ran along all night and all the following day.

Next morning they arrived in sight of Fujisan.

It was the sacred mountain of Japan.

The isolated cone, towering high above all the mountains of the coast, is the prominent scene of the vicinity of Yeddo.

Its snowy summit first catches the dawn, and it flames in the sky long after the beautiful green shores of the bay are in dusky twilight.

A journey to the summit is the religious pilgrimage of the men, while the women, according to a curious custom, are only allowed to ascend it every sixtieth year.

From Yeddo to Yosiwara extends a great road called the Tokaido.

When the air motor reached it, a tremendous procession was seen going toward the capital.

Jack examined the crowd keenly with a glass.

It was easy to see that it was the party of the Mikado of Japan.

The slant-eyed dignitary was being carried on a magnificent dais, borne by a large retinue of human bearers, attendants were holding umbrellas of silk over his royal cocoonut, and others were waving gaudy fans to keep him cool.

"Just the fellow I want to see," said Jack.

"Who is it, lad?" questioned Tim.

"The ruler of the land."

"Lordy, wot a high-toned circus he's got with him!"

There were hundreds of gaudy-figured banners on poles waving to the breeze, scores of wooden-saddled ponies, numerous samsins, dulcimers, violincellos and gottos flared a peculiar melody, palanquins and copper-clad guards, or yakounins.

It looked like the gala party in a Festival of the Banners, or the Feast of the Lanterns.

"I'm going to put the traitorous daimios in his hands," said Jack.

The whole party had seen the airship and paused.

Down she swooped till she paused opposite the Mikado's dais.

The two daimios were brought out, sullen and silent.

"Royal, tell the old rat-eater what his nobles have done."

"Yes, sir," the boy replied.

Everyone of the royal party were greatly terrified over the unusual spectacle of so strange an object coming down from the sky with human beings aboard.

The explorer's son reassured them, however, by shouting in very poor Japanese.

"Hold, good people, we are human like yourselves!"

He then forced the two prisoners to alight.

Then addressing the astonished Mikado, he explained as best he could what they had caught the daimios doing.

His story was believed.

The Southern princes, when leaving their wives and families as hostages at the capital, as is customary, at the expiration of the last congress, had committed a great crime, of which the Mikado knew.

It was to have also left bands of paid louins or bravos secretly organized to defy, harass and weaken the central power.

Political assassinations, arson, conspiracies against the Mikado, were the means by which the daimios endeavored to bring about a revolution of the feudal provinces.

It so incensed the Mikado at what the boy told him, that he drew one of his two swords, and with two blows cut off the heads of the traitors.

He then caused his attendants to attach them to the top of long bamboo poles, and carry them to the city as a warning to all other treasonable subjects.

He then turned to the boy to question him about the extraordinary air motor, but Royal was gone.

He had boarded the Dragon, and Jack had sent the air motor flying in the sky toward the summit of Mount Fujisan.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE SACRED MOUNTAIN.

The Emperor's party was soon left behind the Dragon and she sped swiftly toward the sacred snow-clad volcano.

In a short time they reached the mountain.

It was traversed by difficult roads.

There was a Buddhist monastery at Omio, high up the side of the celebrated mountain, and the upper half was covered with nothing but the rubble and scoria of past eruptions.

Numerous little huts lined the road used as pilgrims' resting places.

The Dragon had to ascend through the clouds, and the air became so rarified that it perceptibly affected the breathing of the aeronauts.

When they reached the crater they found it to be a great oval opening, with jagged lips about three thousand feet wide and 4,500 feet deep.

At some distance away stood some Japanese pilgrims, dressed in white garments, stamped by the priests with various mysterious characters, and idols, images, and having scallop shells on the sleeves.

A thick Scotch mist enveloped them, and they were so intent upon their devotions that they did not observe the flying machine.

There were four men in the party.

They were ringing bells and praying to the founder of the Sinto religion, whose spirit was believed to bestow health and other blessings.

In the midst of their devotions, there suddenly sounded a deep, rumbling roar down in the crater of the volcano.

The ground began to split and shake.

It was a heavy earthquake.

A wild cry escaped the pilgrims.

They had been prostrating themselves in their adoration of the spirit, but now bounded to their feet.

Unluckily for them, the rocky plateau near the edge of the vast crater, up on which they stood, broke from the ground.

It tumbled down into the chasm, carrying them with it.

The crater sloped from that point to the bottom very steeply, and the unfortunate wretches went rolling and tumbling down the declivity like rubber balls.

Their cries of distress were pitiful to hear, and gradually grew fainter the further they descended into the pit.

A feeling of compassion for them overwhelmed Jack.

"Poor fellows!" he cried.

"Great Lord! they're a-goner!" Tim exclaimed.

"It seems so."

"Could yer done dem someding?" asked Fritz.

"What?"

"Go down und safe dem."

"Just my intention."

"Look out!" said Royal.

"For vot?"

"An eruption."

"Is this volcano active?"

"It has not been, Mr. Wright."

"What have we to fear, then?"

"Don't you hear the roaring down there?"

"That's the effect of the earthquake."

"Yes. But it is usually followed by an eruption."

"In that case those four pilgrims will perish."

"No doubt of it."

"I'm going to save them if I can."

"You scarcely have time, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I'll risk it, Royal."

And Jack sent the air motor down in the crater.

She descended swiftly after the four men.

But they reached the bottom ahead of her.

Here they had fallen into a lake formed by the melted snow, and were swimming in the freezing water.

They yelled to our friends in their own language for help, and the Dragon approached them.

Fritz and the sailor had gone out on deck.

As soon as the motor hovered over the men they began to haul them out of the water.

Scarcely had the last man thus been rescued when a sudden deafening explosion was heard, and the water was thrown into a wild state of ebullition.

Hot and steaming were hurled up around the Dragon,

and so burned the men on the deck that they cried out with pain, and made a wild rush for the central turret.

"The volcano! The volcano!" yelled Tim.

"I feared it," muttered Royal.

As quick as a flash Jack turned the entire current into the helix.

Up into the air shot the air motor with startling rapidity, but a cloud of steam enveloped her.

The roaring in the crater continued.

Scarcely had the Dragon reached the edge of the crater when a report was heard of such terrific violence as to almost deafen the inmates of the Dragon.

Jack stopped the helix rapidly enough to hold them only in suspension, and started the screws furiously.

Away shot the motor like a gunshot.

She went none too soon.

A mass of dirt, stone, dust, water, ashes and other matter was suddenly blown ten thousand feet into the air from the vent of the volcano, out of which they just emerged.

Many of the flying particles struck the flying motor with reports like gunshots, but she escaped serious damage.

Down the mountain she flew like an arrow, and in a few moments more a terrible mass of flame and smoke flew up from the crater.

"Safe!" gasped Jack at last, in triumphant tones.

"Gee whiz!" was all Tim could say.

The others were speechless.

Mile after mile rushed the airship away from Fugisan, all the while gradually descending toward the ground.

In a short time she was ten miles to the north of the mountain, and reached the earth.

Here the poor pilgrims, too much terrified to even think of thanking Jack and his companions, sprang aground and sped away as fast as they could run.

Not until then did the rest recover their faculties.

"Lieber Himmel!" cried Fritz, in amazement. "Why ve vos alive?"

"Because I didn't lose my wits," calmly replied Jack.

"An' them lubbers wuz saved anyway!" cried Tim delightedly.

"I intended that they should be," said Jack, quietly.

"It was the most daring rescue I ever saw!" declared Royal.

"Wot!" cried Tim, quickly. "Didn't yer ever hear how I once saved ther hull crew of a ship?"

"No. When was that, Tim?" innocently asked the boy.

"Why, when I wuz in ther navy."

"Let's hear the story, Tim—do."

"Look oud dere!" warned Fritz.

"What for?"

"A vhooper!"

"Veer off thar!" roared Tim.

He hurled a bucket at the Dutchman.

Fritz dodged it and rushed inside, just as Jack started the Dragon.

"Go on, Tim," pleaded the boy. "Give me the yarn."

"I'd tell it if I explode!" averred Tim, in grim tones. "I won't never allow that 'ere Dutch pirate ter interfere with me!"

"I'm listening, Tim."

"Werry good, an' here she goes. Yer see, we wub sailin' in ther Caribbean Sea one arternoon, when a ship wuz sighted sinkin' in ther distance, an' we seen ther hull crew on her deck signalin' us. All their masts an' boats wuz gone, an' ther hull wuz half under. Waal, sir, we steered for her, an' all at once we heered a report."

"Well?" asked Royal, as he paused.

"Our rudder pintles broke. They wuz rusted through. We had ter haul to an' furl sail, leavin' them 'ere poor lubbers to thar doom."

"Why didn't you go after them with the quarter-boats?"

"Wot a question! How could we? It wuz so blamed dark we couldn't see whar ther sinkin' ship laid——"

"But you said it was in the broad light of the after——"

"Shut up!" interposed Tim, snappishly. "I d'want no interruptions, mind yer! Ter container: Whar wuz I? Oh, yes! Thar we wuz helpless ter save them poor lubbers. Waal, sir, wuz I agoin' ter stan' thar? No, sir. Wot did I do? Why, I took a long line, tied one end to my leg, an' the other end ter their frigate. Then I sprung overboard, an' swam fer that sinkin' ship. In five minutes I reached her, an' made ther line fast——"

"But how could you see her if the darkness was so great that——"

"Stow yer gab, will yer!" snapped Tim, giving a hitch at his pants, and glaring ferociously at the boy. "D'yer want me ter pound yer? Then avast! Le'—me—see—wot wuz I a-sayin'? Now I 'member. I got ther rope aboard. Waal, when it wuz tied fast, we all returned ter ther Wabash, hand over hand, over the rope. As soon's we got aboard we cut ther rope, an' sailed away——"

"But your broken rudder was——"

"Gosh blame it, who told yer ter ax questions? Wot d'you know about rudders? If yer sticks in yer oar again, I'll——"

But just then a shout from Jack in the pilot-house interrupted him, and he paused, peered around, and growled:

"All hands to your posts!"

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"There's a typhoon coming!"

Jack pointed away to the eastward.

The old sailor gave a start of alarm.

He saw the storm and knew how dangerous it was.

"Good Lord!" he roared.

Then he dashed inside, followed by Royal.

He had scarcely closed the door when the typhoon struck the Dragon with frightful violence.

The air motor staggered before the blow.

She was dashed away as if she were the lightest tissue paper, and in a moment more her inmates were battling hard to save her from destruction.

CHAPTER XV.

CAUGHT IN THE TYPHOON.

A typhoon storm rages with such intensity and fury that it seems as if heaven and earth strove to return to their original chaos.

This one came from east north-east, and went toward west south-west, in a circle opposite that performed by the hands of a clock.

It originated in the great opposing currents of air called the south-west monsoon, and the north-east trade winds blowing in opposite directions.

A terrible gust of wind swept the air motor up in the air to a great height, and plunged her into a black cloud, from which vivid flashes of lightning were rapidly darting.

There she was whirled around furiously.

She then began to plunge earthward again, beaten down by an awful deluge of rain, and surrounded by flying lightning, while the furious and incessant claps of thunder rolling in the clouds made her shake like a leaf.

Jack added speed to the helix.

Had he not done so the Dragon would have been dashed to the ground and smashed into fragments.

The revolutions of the wheel counteracted the force of the storm, and she ceased her rapid descent.

But she reached a point near the ground ere she paused, and as the gale carried her along, she crashed into a woods.

The shock of her contact with the trees was much as if she had been struck by a gunshot.

Her long wings ripped through the branches and became tangled among the boughs.

It brought her to a momentary pause.

She was ripped through the foliage and shot in the air again in the midst of a shower of trees, bushes and rocks.

An appalling roar came from the wind.

When it went through the trees, a shrieking sound arose like a thousand steam whistles in unison.

Jack saw that it was useless to try to operate the screws with any hope of driving the Dragon out of the area of the storm.

But he knew that the typhoon might pass if he could stop her.

"Tim!" he shouted, to make his voice heard.

"Ay ay, wot now?" roared the old sailor.

"I'm going to try to anchor her."

"Gimme ther wheel, then."

"Look out for obstructions!"

"You bet."

Jack stopped the screws.

That made no difference in the boat's speed.

She was being tossed like a cork in a stormy sea.

It was dangerous to venture out on deck.

The young inventor was as fearless as a lion, however.

He opened the door, and awaiting until the violent agitation subsided for a moment, he plunged over to the railing and got a grip on it to steady himself.

Thence he made his way up forward to where the grapnels were lashed fast.

Jack was obliged to hang on for his life.

The wind was blowing one hundred miles an hour.

Besides the awful rocking and surging of the machine, it was being mercilessly pelted all over with flying missiles.

The young owner of the Dragon was thumped and bruised by these objects and was kept continually dodging the largest ones to avoid being seriously injured.

Armed with a knife, he cut the grapnel lashings and allowed the iron to run over the side and hang suspended.

The Dragon was then plunging earthward.

When the iron reached the ground and began trailing the flukes occasionally caught.

Every time they did so there came a jerk.

It kept the motor hitching along with short pauses.

Finally, however, the grapnel held fast.

It brought the machine to a sudden stop.

The furious wind beat her down and held the cable as taut as a bar of iron as it swept past her.

The Dragon was pushed to the ground despite the whirling of her helix, and pounded up and down.

Everyone aboard of her was knocked about, and the monkey and parrot yelled with fear.

For nearly an hour the motor held thus.

Then her cable parted with a loud report.

Along the ground she rushed, then she bounded into the air.

But the fury of the typhoon was gone.

The Dragon soon attained a height of two thousand feet.

Here she paused in a clear, cold atmosphere.

The typhoon was whirling beneath her like a whirlpool of dark clouds filled with debris.

Now she rode upon an even keel.

"We're all right now, my hearty!"

"Only that rope and grapnel saved us."

"Donnerwetter!" cried Fritz, emerging. "Where ye vos?"

"Gee! What a height!" muttered Royal.

"Wot's our course now?"

"Head northeast."

"Fer ther lake?"

"Yes. We may as well."

Tim started the screws.

Although the Dragon had been handled roughly by the storm, her machinery remained uninjured.

She sped away rapidly.

On the following morning the lake was reached.

Here she descended.

An exploration for the gold mine followed.

Toward mid-day Jack caught sight of several huts.

They were embowered among some trees at the foot of some rugged hills that sloped to the side of the water.

Steering the Dragon near them, he soon caught sight of a number of men around the dwellings.

"They may give us some information of Charles Maxwell," he muttered.

The men in question were evidently a mixture of coolies and yakosins, and Jack saw that they were working with picks and shovels.

In fact, he soon discovered that they were mining.

This fact led him to suppose that he had reached the place where Charles Maxwell had been operating.

Nor was his surmise wrong.

"Fritz!" said he to the Dutchman, who was with him, "if we were to openly go to those fellows for the information we need we would never get it. We therefore must capture one of the coolies and make him tell us what he knows about the explorer."

"I don't see me how you vos do dot."

"Very easily. I'll steer the motor after any one of them. You and Tim must drop a noosed rope down on his and lasso him. That will save all trouble and argument."

"Dot vos so. Ve been retty in vun minutes."

And laughing over the novel plan, Fritz went out.

Jack thereupon brought the Dragon to a point within ten feet of the ground and sent her flying toward the Japanese.

They gave a yell and rushed away when they saw the Dragon.

Jack selected a man and pursued him.

The Dutchman and the sailor hastened up in the bow, carrying a rope, in the end of which there was a slip noose.

The motor was flying close enough to the ground for the man to have touched her.

Rapidly overtaking the frightened coolie, they dropped the noose down over his shoulders, and then gave it a jerk.

It caught around his waist.

"Aloft!" roared Tim.

"Got him?" asked Jack, raising the motor.

"Ay, ay. Up wi' yer!"

The Dragon ascended.

Dangling to the end of the line was the coolie.

He was screaming with dread, and his companions joined their cries with his when they saw him hanging from the end of the line and being carried up into the sky.

At a height of three hundred feet Jack stopped the motor.

Going out on deck, he saw the fat fellow and the sailor hauling up the Japanese until they got him on deck.

Once he was lying on the motor, his fears were allayed.

He glared from one to the other of the aeronauts in the blankest astonishment, and then gasped in his own language:

"What means this?"

Jack called Royal over.

He directed the boy to question the man, and this dialogue ensued:

"You are safe!" said the boy.

"Why have you done this?" asked the coolie.

"To question you. If you lie or fail to reply, we will kill you."

"What do you want of me?"

"First tell me what you and your friends are doing here."

"Digging for gold."

"Wasn't this mine opened by a white man?"

"Yes. He was called Charles Maxwell."

"Then you knew him?" eagerly asked Royal.

"We once formed his retinue from Tokio."

"Ha! you are the men who tried to murder him?"

The man was silent and looked scared.

He had, in his eagerness to please, condemned himself.

Royal told Jack what he said.

"Ask him what became of your father," said the inventor.

The boy complied.

But the coolies professed ignorance.

"I do not know where he went from here," he said.

"Remember, we will kill you if you lie!" said Royal.

"My life is in your hands."

It was evident that the man told the truth.

"Don't any of your companions know?" demanded Royal.

"I am sure they do not."

It was a useless task to question him any further.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Jack sent the motor to the ground.

The man was thereupon set at liberty.

He ran away, glad enough to escape with his life.

The motor was started again for the northward, and passed over a rugged, hilly country.

Stops were made at various settlements, and inquiries were made for information about the lost explorer.

Nothing definite was learned about him, much to Jack's disgust, and the motor kept pressing northward.

The further they went the colder it became, until at last they reached a district where absolute winter was found.

Here the hot rays of the sun no longer beat down on a fine tropical country, but there laid a dreary landscape below covered with a mantle of snow.

The natives wore skin clothing, with the hair side out, the legs were muffled up, and wooden pattens were on their feet.

It did not seem likely to Jack that he would find the man he was looking for in this frigid quarter.

But he resolved to keep ahead until he reached the northern extremity of the island before he turned back.

A severe snow storm came up and enveloped the air motor.

She was then nearly a mile in the air, and her occupants could not see ten yards in advance of the machine.

Night had fallen.

Jack resolved to descend till the storm passed.

He therefore slackened the speed of the helix.

As the motor went down he heard a strange noise below.

He glanced out the window anxiously and peered down.

In a few minutes more there sounded a splash.

The Dragon had fallen into the sea.

Instead of being over the land, as Jack supposed, she had left it behind, and then was over the Pacific.

She was not designed to float in water, and began to sink.

A shout came from Jack's friends in the central turret when they found the water pouring into the Dragon.

Out on deck they rushed, and at one glance saw what had happened.

"Donner und blitzten! Ve vos sinkin'!" roared Fritz.

"Ahoy thar, Jack, raise her up again!" Tim shouted.

"Good heavens, the wheel has stopped!" cried Royal.

Then they made a dash for the pilot-house.

Jack had pulled the lever to make the helix revolve, but the current did not seem to act upon it.

"Mein cracious, Shack," yelled the Dutchman, as he ran in, "vhy don't yer get up oud ohf dis, alretty?"

"I can't make the helix work," was the reply.

"Don'd yer see dot she vos sinkin'?"

"Yes; that is just what caused the mischief."

"How you mean by dot?"

"The salt water is pouring in on the batteries, weakening them."

"Dry der screws."

Jack did so.

They began to revolve.

But they, too, were losing strength fast.

They pushed the machine along a short distance.

A roaring of surf ahead met the ears of the crew.

It gave them to understand that the flying machine was going in shoreward.

But they could not float ashore.

Already the water was flooding the pilot-house.

Still she got very near to the land by means of her screws.

Observing that it was impossible to save her, Jack cried:

"Look out for yourselves, boys!"

Tim and Rayol seized the parrot and monkey.

In a moment more the Dragon sunk from under them, leaving the four struggling for life in the boisterous sea.

The suction of her descent nearly pulled them under, but they were all good swimmers, and held themselves up.

Easily locating the coast by the roaring of the surf, they all headed for it, and finally reached the snow-covered shore.

Here the bitter cold of the keen wind made them shiver. Gathering in a group upon the desolate coast in the blinding snow-storm, the four castaways looked blue enough.

"That's the end of the Dragon," mournfully said Jack.

"Vot landt dis vos?" queried Fritz.

"It must be one of the Chisima, or Koorile islands," replied Tim.

"Then we are off the sea of Okhotsk," remarked the boy.

"We must be," assented Jack, "for the last land I saw before the storm came up was Cape Sirtoko, north-east of Ezo."

"Don'd dere vos some blaces vhere ve oud ohf der colt could got?" anxiously questioned Fritz.

"Ther only way ter find out is ter look," dryly said Tim.

They were all shivering and pained with the cold.

It was intensified by the drenching they got.

"Hold on!" said Jack. "I want to mark the location of the air motor. If the waves don't smash her to pieces, or wash her away, I am going to try to recover her when the storm stops."

"There's mark enough for you," said Royal.

He pointed through the falling flakes.

In back they caught sight of two palms growing together in the form of the letter V.

It was a good distinguishing mark.

Satisfied, Jack led them inland.

The snow was a foot deep, and very dry.

In a short time they came to a mass of trees and rocks.

Getting around to the leeward of them they found a clear spot where they were protected from the wind and snow.

There they crouched until morning.

It had been a fearful night for them, for they suffered intensely from the piercing cold in their wet clothing.

When the sun arose, the storm ceased.

The forlorn four then clambered up on the rocks.

Inland there was a high mountain.

"We are upon an island," remarked Jack.

"Ay, ay an' wot'more, it's inhabited," said Tim.

He pointed off to the westward, where some smoke was curling up to the sky near the shore, and they caught sight of a small village of native huts.

"Strange that human beings should take up their residence upon such an inhospitable inland as this," said Royal.

"Vot der doost dey doon here?" asked Fritz in surprise.

"Heaven only knows," Jack replied. "We must get over there and get food and warmth, or we will perish."

"But s'posen they refuses?" asked Tim.

Everyone was dismayed at the idea.

None of the Japanese were disposed to be charitable to the white race.

They looked upon them as unwelcome interlopers.

Still, the four were in a desperate plight.

None of them were armed, as their hurried flight from the sinking airship precluded the possibility of taking anything.

"We must risk it," said Jack. "Come on."

He led the way through the snow, and the rest followed.

The settlement was about a mile away.

Skirting the coast, they hastened along to get their blood circulating, and finally reached the huts.

They were Japanese dwellings.

There were large numbers of the natives about the place, but most of them were prisoners, fastened together with chains.

From the tops of their heads the tufts of hair had been shaven, and they wore ragged clothing.

Each gang was guarded by a Japanese keeper.

All were engaged in mining coal.

"This must be the island of Ski Rotan!" said Jack.

The place he named was the place of banishment for penal servitude of Japanese malefactors from the big cities.

Here the unfortunate wretches were doomed to hard labor until they perished of hardships and privation.

"Shall I speak to these fellows?" queried Royal.

"Ask them for food and shelter," replied the inventor.

The boy strode forward toward the natives, who were looking at them in utter amazement, and addressed the keepers with:

"We were wrecked upon this island, and are in need of help."

"This place is forbidden to all trespassers," said the head man.

"But we could not help landing here."

"That does not excuse you. The laws of Japan demand that I shall make prisoners of you."

The boy was startled by this reply.

He turned to his companions and told them what was said.

While he was speaking the keepers approached.

"Even as prisoners you may get food and shelter," hurriedly said Jack. "But for my part, I shall remain at liberty till I see if you are well treated. Should you suffer abuse, I may be enabled to render you some assistance."

"Go then, and we will guard your retreat," cried Royal.

Jack dashed away, taking Whiskers and Bismarck with him.

Some of the guards chased him.

His friends threw themselves in their way.

Jack was thus enabled to escape, but they were captured.

Dragged into one of the huts, the clothing was stripped from the three prisoners, and Japanese suits were put on them.

They had the advantage of being dry, and the exchange was therefore more a boon than a discomfort.

Then, to their disgust, they were all led out, and each one was secured to a gang of the prisoners and forced to work.

Royal glanced at the man to whom he was secured.

A cry of astonishment escaped him.

"Merciful God! my father!" he shouted.

The man turned as pale as death and seized the boy.

"Royal!" he fairly shrieked.

It was the lost explorer.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DRAGON TO THE RESCUE.

Jack lost no time in getting as far away from the penal settlement as possible, and the violent exercise warmed him up.

He realized that his three companions were in no serious danger for the present, and, therefore, did not have much anxiety about them.

"I'll go back to where the Dragon sunk," he thought. "The tide was up high when she went under. By this time it must be low. Perhaps I can dive down into her, and get some weapons. If the Japanese keepers mean to keep the boys prisoners, I may be able to render them more help to escape if I am armed."

With this purpose in view, he hurried along.

In half an hour he reached the bent palms.

Glancing down at the shore he saw that the tide had receded a great distance, as the storm had been rolling it far upon the land during the preceding night.

To Jack's utter astonishment he caught sight of the Dragon. She was almost high and dry.

The wash of the tide, the strength of the wind and surf and the impetus of her screws before they lost the power of driving the air motor had sent her into shoal water.

She lay bow on the beach.

The surf was breaking over her stern.

With a glad cry Jack ran down to her.

As soon as he leaped upon the deck he saw that she had not suffered any damage from her immersion except to lose the power of her batteries.

Her bow being several feet higher than the stern, threw all the water in the hull aft.

Consequently Jack imagined that the cells of battery up in the bow must be in working condition.

He passed into the pilot-house and got rid of the parrot and monkey.

Lifting the trap in the floor, he descended into the hold.

Just as he had expected, the forward series of batteries were not covered by the water, but their contents were ruined.

He then made his way to the store room.

Procuring some fresh chemicals from the air and water tight tanks, he returned to the hold and charged the cells again.

This done, he coupled the helix machinery to these cells and started the big rotoscope spinning.

It raised the motor a few feet.

She was very heavy with the water she shipped.

Jack next opened a trap in the bottom of the hull.

The water thus drained off.

In a few moments the Dragon was free of the brine.

Lightened, she began to mount higher in the air, but Jack stopped her ascent, and recharged the rest of the batteries.

He then examined everything in the motor.

Most of the provisions and all the fresh water were spoiled.

Everything was drenched.

Jack lighted the electric stove.

It disseminated a grateful heat.

He soon felt more comfortable.

Then he dried his wet clothing.

Having left other necessities to dry out, and securing a large number of grenades and rifles, he returned to the pilot-house.

Pulling the screw lever, he found that they spun around with their usual vigor, and he steered the Dragon away.

Along she swept through the air at a height of one hundred feet, going in the direction of the settlement.

Jack was the most delighted mortal in Japan.

He never expected such good luck as this.

"I'll wrest my friends from the hands of those yellow villains in less than no time now!" he muttered, triumphantly.

The Dragon soon hovered over the village.

Jack then caused her to descend near the mine shafts from which the prisoners were carrying the coal in baskets.

A glance at them through a glass had shown Jack that his friends were among the workers.

All the natives were terrified at the sight of the Dragon.

They flung themselves down and bowed their heads to the ground.

Down settled the machine, and as soon as she touched the ground, Tim, Fritz, Royal and the lost explorer rushed for her.

They were obliged to take the prisoners with them to whom they were chained, and the Japanese convicts being in fear of Jack's singular contrivance fought to get away.

This held the prisoners back.

Jack procured a file.

With this he rapidly cut Fritz's fetters, and the Dutchman soon liberated the other three.

The Japanese keepers recovered from their fright by this time, and began to suspect that the flying machine was not supernatural.

As this conviction grew upon them, they seized their weapons and began to fire at the prisoners.

Jack anticipated this move.

He therefore lost no time in returning the bombardment.

As the grenades exploded among the Japs, and wounded several of them, the firing suddenly ceased.

They recoiled, yelling like demons.

All the convicts were struggling to bury themselves in the mine.

Fritz had the greatest difficulty to liberate his companions, but finally managed to do so.

The convicts to whom they had been fastened dashed away.

Then the four boarded the air motor.

Jack sent her up in the sky.

She was followed by a volley of musket shots.

But they rattled harmlessly against the iron-clad hull of the Dragon, and the ascent stopped at a height of 500 feet.

Jack went out on deck.

"A white man!" he gasped, seeing Royal's father.

"It's ther one wot we wuz searchin' fer," said Tim.

"What! The lost explorer?"

"Ay, ay!"

Jack was thoroughly amazed.

He glanced at the man and muttered:

"Can it be possible that you are Charles Maxwell?"

"Yes, sir, that is my name. This boy is my son," said the explorer.

"We've found him, Mr. Wright!" joyfully cried Royal.

"How did you happen to be a captive here?" asked Jack.

"My story is a long one."

"We know most of it," interposed Jack.

"You do?" was the surprised reply.

"From the time you left home until you secured and hid your gold."

"Then you know what my step-brother did?"

"Adam Sloat tried to kill you."

"Yes, but I defeated him."

"He also strove to murder Royal."

"What! My son, too!"

"So the boy would not stand in his way to get your fortune."

"By heavens, Sloat was a terrible villain."

"Very true. We will tell you what he did when you finish your story."

"Then I'll describe my history. After getting a fortune in gold from the mine, I had it carried to the coast and hid it," said the explorer. "I then resumed my march northward with two men—coolies—whom I imagined to be faithful to me. In due time I discovered my error. They betrayed my confidence."

"How?"

"As they had to help me hide the gold, they of course knew where I placed it. Doubtless they were overwhelmed with greed. It caused them to plan to get possession of the bars of metal into which the gold was melted. At any rate, when we reached the city of Aomori, they accused me of treason. I was arrested, tried and sentenced to lifelong penal service on this island. And here I have been for a long time while the two coolies have probably gone back to the place where the gold was buried, and have carried it away, leaving me no better off than I was before."

"What a pity!" sympathetically added Jack.

He then detailed what Royal had undergone.

It made Charles Maxwell furious when he learned to what extent the captain of the Fog Bell had gone.

"He shall be punished for his perfidy!" he cried.

Then he asked Jack all about the Dragon.

"If you like," said the young inventor, when he finished his recital. "I'll carry you to the place where you hid your gold. If it is yet there we may be able to carry it home for you, if its weight don't exceed two tons."

"There was not half that," replied Charles Maxwell. "But I fear it is gone. It is almost useless to go there."

"You are not positive it is gone!" said Jack.

"No; but there seems but little probability of its yet being there. However, if you choose we might look."

"I shall do so, if you will direct me to the cache."

"It is on the southeast coast, between Odaka and Namie."

"Are you aware that the Fog Bell which sailed from Wrights-town Bay for Tokio after a cargo of tea ought to be here now?" asked Jack.

"If she is, and we reach the city in safety, I shall make her rascally commander dearly pay for his crimes."

Jack started the Dragon for Nippon.

Shortly afterward Fritz came in with news that there were no food or water aboard.

When the Dragon reached Ezo, she descended to a small fresh water stream, and her casks were refilled.

Jack and Fritz then armed themselves and started off in quest of game, as they were all become ravenously hungry.

The big island had escaped the snow storm.

But it was bitterly cold.

This island abounded with deer, antelope, bear, fox, badger and boar.

The inventor and his friend had not gone far when they met a herd of the latter creatures in a rather startling way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE GOLD.

A beautiful antelope had dashed from a thicket when Jack brought his pneumatic rifle to his shoulder and fired.

The ball struck the beast and it bounded into the air.

Jack ran into a clearing to secure his game, when there suddenly sounded a terrific rush of footsteps in back of him.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw a herd of boars.

No sooner had he caught sight of the little beasts, when they reached him, and ere he could get out of their way, they struck his legs and carried him off his feet.

Down went Jack with a bang.

He rolled over and over upon the ground, and dozens of the grunting and squealing animals ran over him.

They did not hurt his body, but when they trod upon his face, hands and neck, the pain was intense.

Jack struggled to get up.

"Hey, Fritz!" he shouted.

"Yah, I vos comin'!"

"Help me—quick!"

And so saying, Jack laid about him with his rifle.

He thumped the boars right and left, and the noise increased.

Then he scrambled to his feet.

Several of the beasts resented the blows and showed fight.

Wheeling around, they charged on Jack, and the tusks of one struck him in the leg, inflicting a gash.

This terrible tooth was as sharp as a needle.

Just then Fritz appeared.

He saw Jack surrounded by scores of the piggish animals, and rushed into their midst to scatter them.

Jack now shot the one that assailed him.

Most of them were frightened.

There were others, however, that showed such a ferocity of temper that they became foes to be feared.

Several of them now dashed at Jack's legs, and he had the greatest difficulty in driving them back.

Around flew his rifle, and he drove them back as fast as they rushed at him, and Fritz fought his way to Jack's side. The Dutchman kept firing.

Half a dozen of the brutes fell before his shots.

The others seemed to have no fear, and charged relentlessly again and again upon the Dutchman and the inventor.

Hemmed in on all sides, and finding themselves getting exhausted, they both glanced around.

There were several cypress trees standing near, and Jack cried:

"Go for the trees, Fritz!"

"Shiminey, vot picks!"

"I can't hold out much longer!"

"Und me neider. Mine arms near vos proke."

They took advantage of a momentary respite, and running for the trees, they dashed the boars aside and got up in the branches.

Here they were safe, although the boars charged on the trunks again and again with a viciousness that was startling.

Both were forced to abandon their rifles.

They had their revolvers, however, and used them to such good effect that they soon killed the rest of the fighters.

"Dot saddles id!" cried Fritz.

"We've got pork enough to last a year."

They descended to the ground again.

Here the antelope and a number of the best boars were secured, and they returned to the Dragon.

"We've got provisions enough now to keep us from want until we reach some city where we can lay in a supply of what we lack," said Jack.

"Terrible to be without food," said Charles Maxwell.

"I reckon as I knows vot that is," said Tim, significantly.

"Ever been starved?" asked the explorer.

"Lordy, yes. Yer see, it happened from shipwreck."

"Dreadful! Was you wrecked?"

"Wuz I? Waal, I should smile."

"How did it occur?"

"Why," said Tim, taking a chew of plug. "Yer see it happened when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash in the navy. an——"

Just then Fritz started to grind on his accordion beside Tim paused, glared at the door, and slammed it shut.

"Blast that lubber, he only done that ter aggervate me!" he growled, satisfied now, as the music was drowned.

"What was you going to say?" asked the explorer.

"Why, we got taken amidsips by a ox-eye squall," said Tim, as Jack sent the Dragon up in the air two hundred feet, "an' it blowed every stitch o' canvas out o' ther bolt ropes, an' tore ther rudder ter pieces, opened ther frigate's seams, an' she began to sink. Every one took to ther boats. Jist as I wuz about ter row' off I seen as one man wuz lef' behind. Thar wuzn't room fer him in ther boat, so wot should I do but return ter ther frigate an' tell him ter take my place——"

"That was a gallant deed, Tim."

"Ay, but I knowed ther boat couldn't weather ther storm, an' wuz bound ter go down; an', as I had a grudge agin him, thought that'd be a mighty easy way ter even matters up."

"Oh!" said Maxwell, with a disappointed look.

"Anyway," continued Tim, "afore he could git in ther boat, ther waves busted ther davit lines, an' she disappeared in ther gloom. Waal, sir, thar we wuz on ther sinkin' ship, all ther perwisions spiled, an' all ther water ruined. Wuz I goin' ter die? Not much! Wot did I do? Why, I sot that lubber ter break at ther pumps, an' every time he stopped I soaked him in Atr jaw wi' my wooden leg. Forty days went by, and ther storm wuz gone, but I kept that 'ere pirate a-workin' ther pumps night and day without stoppin' a minute——"

"What! Working forty days without food or water?"

"Ay, that he did," assented Tim. "I wuz near starved myself, ter tell ther truth, but by takin' a reef in my belt an' chawin' terbacker, why, I made out fairly well livin' on my own fat. Anyhow, ter make a long story short, we finally hove in sight o' land, an' thar wuz all my messmates on ther shore, tickled ter death ter see us, as we'd saved the ship. As soon's we took 'em aboard, we plugged up ther leak, sot sail, an' tacked off——"

"But your sails and rudder were gone!"

Tim started.

He had lost track of this fact.

Scratching his head, and looking perplexed, he said:

"That's so. Blamed if I didn't forgit it!"

"I'm afraid you haven't been telling me the truth!"

"Wot! Don't yer believe me?"

"I'm sorry to say I couldn't if I tried."

"Then I'm a liar?"

"The worst I ever saw."

Tim sized the explorer up.

But he didn't do anything dangerous.

For Maxwell held a rifle in his hand.

"Waal," said Tim, "if yer wasn't a new acquaintance, I wouldn't allow yer ter say that ter my face."

"Oh, you needn't stand on ceremony," laughed the explorer.

"But I never kills a man wot's got orphan children!"

"Oh! I'm much obliged to you for sparing my life. I'll never forget your kindness. Tim, I admire your consideration for my boy's feelings."

"You're werry welcome," said Tim, condescendingly.

And feeling perfectly satisfied with himself, he stumped away without noticing Royal and his father laughing at him.

Fritz cooked them a good meal.

As they were all very hungry they soon finished it.

In the meantime they had changed their garments, and as the Dragon went on all night they reached Nippon.

On the following afternoon they drew near the mountains on the other side of which lay the place where Maxwell claimed to have concealed his treasure.

It was a dull, hazy day when they ran in among the mountains and went through the pass Maxwell pointed out.

"Whereabouts did you put the gold?" Jack asked him.

"In a cave near the shore," replied the explorer.

"Wasn't that a risky place?"

"No, for we covered the entrance with rocks and bushes, and as it is in an isolated spot there was not much danger of one discovering it by chance."

"There is the sea ahead there. We will soon discover whether your two coolies have tampered with it or not."

Jack pointed through the pass.

Far ahead they could discern the dark waters of the Pacific gleaming in the roseate hue of the declining sun.

All trace of wintry aspect had vanished in the north astern of the air motor, and they now drifted through a region of tropical vegetation.

The Dragon sped swiftly through the pass.

In a short time she opened up the clear ground on the east of the mountain range.

Here there was a small bay surrounded by rocks.

"At the head of the bay, among those rocks, is the place," said the explorer, pointing ahead.

"What ship is that lying there?" demanded Jack.

"Good heaven—so there is one—English or American, too!"

"I'll soon-see with my glass."

Jack peered through the binocular.

A startled cry pealed from his lips.

"She has just come to anchor there!" he exclaimed.

"Ha! To get the gold?"

"I suspect so, as there are two Japs on her deck."

"Can you make out what she is?"

"Yes. An American vessel."

"If she has come for the gold we may baffle them."

"So we can. At least I'll try to get there first!"

"Can you make out her name?"

"Yes. She is the Fog Bell—Adam Sloat's ship!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VILLAIN IS DEAD.

Jack's remark filled Charles Maxwell with amazement.

He grasped the glass and earnestly studied the vessel.

"Sure enough—it is the Fog Bell!" he cried, excitedly.

"Do you recognize the natives?"

"Yes. They are the two traitors who betrayed me."

"Then it is clear enough that they have been to Tokio and there met with Adam Sloat. Telling him about the presence of the gold here, they have come up with his ship to get it."

"Your theory must be right; it sounds so plausible."

"We may thwart them yet."

"There goes a quarter-boat down."

"Can they easily get into the cave?"

"No, for its entrance is choked up with rocks."

"Then they will have to remove them all?"

"Yes, and that will occupy much time."

"Just what we need!"

So saying, Jack put full speed on, and the airship shot through the atmosphere like an arrow.

She made very rapid time.

Finally she reached the rocks.

The boat's crew had landed.

As the Dragon descended, Jack saw a group of sailors, two Japs, and the ugly, bewhiskered captain of the ship standing in front of the cavern entrance, tearing away the rocks from the hole.

Down to the ground went the airship in back of the rock.

Led by the young inventor, they rushed around the rocks and confronted the startled sailors.

"Adam Sloat, hands up!"

It was Charles Maxwell who uttered this cry.

Both the captain and the two Japs uttered a wild yell when they saw the man they wronged appear before them so suddenly, attended by his friends.

They recoiled in horror and turned deathly pale.

"Back to your ship with you!" cried Jack to the sailors.

They made a rush, for the arms carried by our friends had a very threatening appearance.

Sloat and the Japanese started to go with them.

"Hold!" shouted Maxwell.

The captain kept on.

Maxwell fired at him.

Struck by the ball, he fell in his tracks.

Two more shots pealed out, and both of the natives bit the dust.

He rushed up to his perfidious step-brother.

Sloat lay groaning and nursing a wound in his leg.

"Baffled—baffled!" he howled when he saw Maxwell.

"Oh, you viper!" cried the explorer, indignantly.

"Now you'll get the gold."

"Who has a better right? Don't I own it?"

"Curse you, but I didn't expect you back."

"No, of course not. But I came just the same."

"If my game had only succeeded——"

"Ah! but it failed. You inhuman wretch, I ought to hang you for attempting to take my life."

"Don't you do it," gasped Sloat in alarm. "After all, I didn't succeed. You have no right to hurt me as long as I didn't hurt you, Charles Maxwell."

He was a pitiful coward.

A look of mingled contempt and disdain swept over the face of the explorer, and he said:

"Crawl away—crawl away! The sight of you disgusts me!"

Just then Royal came up.

Sloat let out a yell when he saw the boy.

He bounded to his feet, held up his trembling hands, and yelled, in a paroxysm of superstitious fear:

"A ghost—a ghost!"

He imagined he had murdered the boy.

Seeing him thus unexpectedly appear a second time horrified him.

"I'm no ghost," the boy replied. "You was foiled by Jack Wright in your attempt upon my life."

"Jack Wright," muttered the man.

Then he ran away.

A sudden fear entered his mind that they might riddle him with bullets, and he made up his mind to stand the pain of his wounded leg to escape.

No one tried to stop him.

He thus managed to get back to the ship.

In a short time she sped out of the bay to sea.

Adam Sloat had been thwarted at every turn.

The two treacherous Japanese had been lying on the ground like dead men while they spoke to Sloat.

But when Jack now turned to address them, they were gone.

Both had been playing possum.

As soon as they noticed that they were not observed they lost no time in making their escape.

"Both gone!" commented Jack.

"Let them!" said Maxwell. "We've got the gold."

"Wait until we see."

"I bring der Tragon over here," said Fritz.

"Good!" assented Tim. "An' we'll finish openin' ther cave."

The four then set to work upon a heap of stones that were piled up against the face of the rocks.

Sloat and his men had partially succeeded in opening the entrance to the treasure cavern.

Our friends soon completed the work.

A small, dark aperture was revealed.

Just then the Dutchman landed the air motor in the clearing in front of the cave.

"Fetch a lantern, Fritz," cried Jack.

The fat fellow did so and they all entered the cave.

It was a small place.

A hole was then dug in the floor at the spot indicated by the explorer and here a number of crude pigs of gold were seen.

"The treasure is safe!" cried the explorer, delightedly.

"Why, you have got a large fortune here," said Jack.

"Shall we tote 'em aboard o' ther Dragon?" asked Tim.

"Yes—by all means."

The work was done.

A feeling of intense relief overcame everyone when it was safe.

Jack then started the helix.

The extra weight of the gold required all the strength of the batteries to lift the airship.

But it did the work.

"Now for home!" cried Jack.

"Will you start from here?" asked the explorer.

"Certainly. It will shorten our sea voyage."

The machine was directed out over the sea.

Afar, in the distance, near a coast village, a strange scene was witnessed by our friends, called the Matsouri of Gots-Tennoo.

The people had hoisted upon their shoulders a litter, upon which rested the throne of their divine patron, Tengou, the winged god, and carried it through the waves.

The fishermen struggled tumultuously with the priests for possession of it, and a great noise arose among them.

It was like the sport of so many happy school boys.

The air motor then ran out over the Kuro-siwo, or Asiatic gulf stream, which flows northward past the eastern shores of Japan at the rate of forty miles a day.

It is as warm as 85 degrees, and is the same current that carries fog and rain to Alaska.

Everyone aboard of the Dragon felt happy that night, despite the fact that they had met with so many hardships, for thus far everything turned out well.

Jack and his two friends had enjoyed more amusement from the journey than they anticipated, and had had the pleasure of rescuing the lost explorer.

On the other hand, Royal had been delighted at the recovery of his father whom he feared was not alive, and Charles Maxwell was grateful for having been delivered from the bondage he suffered and for recovering his gold.

The sky had taken on a very gloomy aspect.

A heavy storm was evidently impending.

Jack had no desire to get caught in it with that heavy cargo of gold on board, and therefore added speed to the helix.

The Dragon rapidly mounted upward.

She passed through the dark storm clouds presently and shaped her course for the eastward.

As she sped along, the storm broke beneath her.

A terrific fall of rain went down.

Heavy peels of thunder shook the clouds, and vivid flashes of lightning darted through the sky.

"It's lucky we ain't down in that storm," said Maxwell, grimly.

"Yes. I—hark! What's that—human voices?" said Jack.

From below came the sound of men shouting.

Jack leveled his glass down at the sea.

He caught sight of a large ship laboring in the storm.

Just then there came an awful crash of thunder, and a blinding streak of lightning flew down at the ship.

It struck her mainmast.

Down it flew to the deck, shattering it.

One of the men fell, struck by the fearful bolt.

"Heaven's retribution!" cried Jack.

"What's that?" asked the explorer.

"That ship is the Fog Bell, and Adam Sloat was just struck by the lightning and killed. Look down."

Maxwell complied.

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "The villain is dead!"

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

Both Tim and Fritz were apprised of the news, and they watched the Fog Bell struggling with the storm every time the dark clouds opened so they could see down to the ocean.

Presently, however, they lost all trace of the stricken ship.

The air motor remained high above the storm.

The weight of the gold in her hold held her up very still when the great wings were spread, and she drove rapidly ahead to the eastward in a strong current of wind.

On the following morning they were half way over the Pacific, as the Dragon had made very rapid headway, and after breakfast Jack took an inventory of the gold.

At the conclusion he remarked to Charles Maxwell:

"As near as I can estimate there is over \$300,000 worth of the metal. You are a very rich man now."

"I intend to equally divide it among all hands on board," the explorer remarked quietly.

"No, we will not permit that," said Jack.

"What! Surely you would not refuse so large a sum——"

"My dear Maxwell, both my friends and myself are very rich."

"So I have heard."

"What then do we want with so small a sum?"

The explorer looked abashed.

What he deemed a munificent sum was a mere bagatelle to these people, so he said:

"Well, I meant everything for the best."

"And I appreciate your generosity," warmly said Jack.

That relieved Maxwell.

Jack then went up into the wheelhouse.

There he found Tim and Royal.

"Do tell me the story," the boy was pleading.

"Orright," said the old sailor, as Jack relieved him of the wheel, and he strolled out on deck with the boy, and added: "Yer see, ther ole frigate Wabash wuz attryin' ter beat aroun' Cape Horn ag'in ther strongest kind o' head winds. Waal, sir, it wuz sich a dark stormy night, we couldn't see an inch ahead o' ther bowsprit. All at once we struck a rock. Water poured inter ther frigate an' she begun ter sink. Thar wuz only one way ter save her, so I yells ter ther carpenter ter nail a board over ther hole inside, an' I sprung overboard."

At this juncture a melancholy wail arose from within the cabin, and Tim's extraordinary yarn came to a sudden end. Tim glared at the central turret.

"The accordeon!" he hissed.

He then made a bee-line for the door, but Fritz had been wise enough to belt it inside, and he couldn't get in.

The Dutchman kept on playing, and Tim began to rave furiously, and struggling to get in.

It was of no use, however.

He had to give it up.

The day passed by uneventfully.

On the following morning Jack sighted the American coast.

"There's British America now, Fritz," he remarked. "The worst of our journey is over now, and we will soon get rid of the gold and finish the trip unhampered."

In an hour more the Dragon left the Pacific astern.

Her course was then changed to the southward, and she flew down the coast toward California.

No accident occurred to mar the pleasure of their trip, and in due time she arrived on the outskirts of San Francisco under cover of the night.

Here she alighted.

Jack and Maxwell then went to the city.

On the following morning arrangements were completed for the disposal of the gold.

It was taken from the motor and carted away.

Then it was sold.

A large sum of money was realized.

Maxwell made a second attempt to induce Jack and his companions to accept a proportionate share.

But they firmly refused.

They were entirely satisfied with the sport they had.

Embarking on the Dragon again, the whole party went up in the air, and continued their homeward journey.

Relieved of the weight of the gold, the air motor now worked with all her former freedom.

She sped swiftly across the continent.

In due course of time the machine reached Wrightstown.

Jack steered the Dragon toward his shop.

Some of the workmen opened the roof, and under the young inventor's skillful guidance, the Dragon went down through the opening and paused with a gentle shock.

Her long journey was finished.

Everyone alighted.

Jack's wife and child greeted them.

The monkey and the parrot were taken to the house.

On the following morning Royal and his father were domiciled in their own home, richer by thousands of dollars, and triumphant over the treacherous man who had striven so hard to put them out of the way.

Jack Wright has no stancher friends than these two.

Suffice it to say that the information Charles Maxwell gave to civilization as a result of his exploring trip through Japan, proved to be a most valuable fund of knowledge.

Jack, Tim and Fritz stored the Dragon away.

She had faithfully performed her duty, and was considered one of the inventor's most valuable contrivances.

With such a wonderful talent for producing these marvels as Jack possessed, and having plenty of money with which to carry out his experiments, it was no wonder that his active mind soon occupied itself with a new invention.

A most brilliant plan had suggested itself to his busy brain, and he began to arrange the details.

One of the most wonderful devices was evolved in the end.

It is almost needless to say that he set to work to construct the peculiar machine.

Tim and Fritz proved to be most able assistants, as they always had been with his former works.

An extraordinary epoch in the history of the three was marked by the ultimate production of the patent.

Our readers will presently discover the result in a new story of the friends and the new invention.

THE END.

Read "THE RIVAL BASEBALL CLUBS; OR, THE CHAMPIONS OF COLUMBIA ACADEMY," by Allyn Draper, which will be the next number (267) of "Pluck and Luck."

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